ISABEL ALLENDE AND TONI MORRISON: PATRIARCHAL AND MATRIARCHAL DYNAMICS IN THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS AND SONG OF SOLOMON

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
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Master of Arts
in
English: Literature

by

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San Francisco, California

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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read "Isabel Allende and Toni Morrison: Patriarchal and Matriarchal Dynamics in The House of the Spirits and Song of Solomon" by Carol Marie Lynch, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree: Master of Arts in English: Literature at San Francisco State University.

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Isabel Allende and Toni Morrison:
Patriarchal and Matriarchal Dynamics in
The House of the Spirits and Song of Solomon

Carol Marie Lynch
San Francisco State University
1991

In my Thesis I will examine similarities in both characterization and subject matter in the novel The House of the Spirits by Isabel Allende and the novel Song of Solomon by Toni Morrison. Both novels have father-figures who attempt to dominate and control family members and the people in their communities. But the women in these stories possess supernatural powers that exceed the often narrow-minded patriarchal ideals of the men, thus offering individuals unique ways to form their views of the world and discover their true identities. I will examine the dynamics that exist between the patriarchal and matriarchal systems in these works in an attempt to better understand the individual characters and the societies in which they live.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.

Chair, Thesis Committee

5/6/91
Date

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INTRODUCTION

The works of Chilean author Isabel Allende and African-American author Toni Morrison represent two distinct backgrounds that differ in language and culture, yet share similar religions and traditions which help to shape the patriarchal societies in which the stories take place. Allende's novels, set in South America, depict the people's fight for liberation from dictatorial repression that has been an intricate part of recent Chilean history, while Morrison's novels depict the lives of African-Americans living in the United States, and their ongoing struggle for justice and equality. Although the historical accounts we read are fictionalized, we come away from the novels with a clearer understanding of both the Latin American and the African-American communities. An examination of the similarities between these two struggling communities, and the individuals who reside in them, helps to break down the communication barriers caused by culture and language, and offers insights into a common human experience that exists beyond race, sex, class and nationality.

When Isabel Allende gave a talk at the Herbst Theatre in San Francisco in February 1989, she commented that "there are more similarities that bring us together than differences that separate us" (Allende, Talk, 1989). She

made this statement in reference to the relationship between the United States and Chile, and it rings true as I read the wonderful stories written by these two women writers, stories that highlight the problems that exist when people are repressed by materialism and violence, when women and other victims of elitism are not allowed to decide their own destinies. Both authors offer us the disturbing truths that underlie seemingly pleasant surface realities, never allowing us to forget that these problems continue to haunt us today.

Allende and Morrison offer much more than historical data or political suggestions. Through their works they challenge the readers to look beyond the boundaries that surround them, and reach outside their narrow visions where even the possibility of magic can exist. Magic realism, which is used in such a way as to offer hope for the future and infinite possibility for change, is a strong method of representation in many of the works by these authors. Allende stated in an interview that "it is not worth the trouble to make a boundary between events that occur within pages and those that take place outside . . . if something is not true at this moment, it may be true tomorrow" (Coleman, 22). Allende uses magic realism in order to show the supernatural or otherworldly qualities that certain characters possess, while Morrison continually interweaves dreamlike visions with magic, dreams that often confuse and

upset the characters who confront them. Critic Craig Werner commented that Morrison's novel Song of Solomon resembles Latin American literature much more than North American works due to Morrison's use of magic realism. He states:

> Morrison's novel resembles nothing in American literature as much as it resembles the "magic realism" displayed in the contemporary Latin American novels of Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel Marquez, Miguel Angel Asurias, and Guillermo Cabrera Infante. Magic realism is not a specific aesthetic theory, but a style. The magic realist emphasizes disorienting images which seem unreal projections of a particular character's psychic state. He then imbeds the images within a reality the focal character shares with one or more additional characters. This may serve either to validate the first character's perception or to question the solidity of any perceived reality.
>
> (Werner, 89)

The questioning of perceived realities is a central issue in the works of these authors, with magic realism becoming much more than a stylistic technique to allow for unreal psychic projections. Allende and Morrison create worlds in which magic becomes both a necessity and a reality. As Werner asserts, magic is a natural part of Morrison's characters, for it allows them to maintain control in their lives and connects them with their roots. He writes:

> In Song of Solomon she portrays the dominant Euro-American culture's attempt to distort the images rooted in Afro-American myth and folk culture. In order to demonstrate the significance of the repressed mythology in black life, Morrison balances dreamlike and realistic imagery. Characters see the physical world as a dream, only to find the dream elements confronting them in concrete forms. Magic colors reality. What Euro-American culture dismisses as superstition reflects a sense of myth necessary to the mental health of Morrison's characters.
>
> (Werner, 89)

Magic realism expands our perception of the world and allows the characters within the novels to exude power in often inexplicable ways. The women in these novels, in particular, use magic to cultivate meaning and gain satisfaction in patriarchal societies that attempt to repress them.

Toni Morrison, in an article titled "Memory, Creation, and Writing," discusses her own motives behind writing the kind of literature that she does.

> My compact with the reader is not to reveal an already established reality (literary or historical) that he or she and I agree upon beforehand. I don't want to assume or exercise that kind of authority. I regard that as patronizing, although many people regard it as safe and reassuring. And because my metier is Black, the artistic demands of Black culture are such that I cannot patronize, control, or pontificate. In the Third World cosmology as I perceive it, reality is not already constituted by my literary predecessors in Western culture. If my work is to confront a reality unlike that received reality of the West, it must centralize and animate information discredited by the West--discredited not because it is not true or useful or even of some racial value, but because it is information held by discredited people, information dismissed as "lore" or "gossip" or "magic" or "sentiment."
>
> (Morrison, Thought, 388)

By not establishing any set reality, Morrison is able to explore the minds of her characters extensively, revealing both the inner and outer lives of the individuals. We see and understand the main characters in their entirety; we don't just know a few details or points of interest, but instead we are exposed to their inner worlds, their secret thoughts, their wildest dreams, their most intriguing memories. These complete character studies make all

boundaries transparent, allowing us to see how human lives interconnect with one another.

Isabel Allende said that her aim in writing The House of the Spirits was to reveal Latin American reality, with all its social aspects. Latin American scholar Maureen Shea states:

> During an interview Isabel Allende stated that in her novel, La casa de los espíritus, she wished to depict the reality of the Latin American continent: its social classes, its urban and rural communities, its historical and geographical realities, and the magical aspects of life in that part of the world.
>
> (Shea, 57)

As with Song of Solomon, the reality in The House of the Spirits is by no means set or predictable either. There are confusing rumors about the characters, there are dreams and visions that are more significant than what happens in awakened states, there is a code of ethics that changes and recreates itself at each new turn of events. And once again, we see the interconnectedness of the characters, and how significantly all actions affect all other actions.

I chose to examine Allende's The House of the Spirits and Morrison's Song of Solomon because the commonalities between the characters in these novels represent the dynamics at work between matriarchal and patriarchal traditions. The families in these works parallel one another on many levels; both consist of a dominating father figure, magical female figures and children who must complete ritualistic journeys in order to secure growth and

identity. A study of the similarities of the characterization in these novels further reveals the similar patterns that emerge in theme and structure, such as the powerful patriarchy that runs the countries and attempts to control the families, and the often subtle matriarchal forces at work, forces connected with magic, dreams, and the supernatural. In both novels, characters attempt to reconcile with these opposing forces in order to survive as individuals and heal the wounds of the past.

Each of the three chapters I have written focuses on particular characters and the similarities between the means by which they create and utilize power, and all three chapters include the discussion of the problems that face various sexes, races, and classes of people. Although there are obviously effective and destructive uses of power, it is dangerous if not impossible to draw solid boundaries between the two, or the three, or the four forms of power that recur. There is not always a clearly recognizable line between good or bad, right or wrong, especially when one is looking at the works of these two complicated and prolific writers. Critic Michael Moody, in his article entitled "Isabel Allende and the Testimonial Novel," asserts:

> Though Isabel Allende posits love as a bulwark against dissolution and measures evil by the violence it engenders, she does not divide the world in simplistic terms between villains and victims. Many forces are at work in the world and her characters reveal a variety of strengths and weaknesses. Yet she imparts to them all, however eccentric, apathetic or brutal, a core value of human dignity, a final affirmation of humanity and redemption that never justifies

> unqualified despair nor excludes the possibility of reconciliation. Within her vision, the best in human nature and society will prevail, if not now, then someday.
>
> (Moody, 40)

Instead of categorizing and assuming easy solutions, one is always caught in an unending cycle of loop holes and contradictions. The solutions are not easy ones, but then again, neither are the problems.

My first chapter focuses on the traditional patriarchal institution in these novels and the many paradoxes that envelop it. This chapter focuses mainly on Esteban Trueba (The House of the Spirits) and Macon Dead (Song of Solomon), who embody patriarchal ideals and attempt to maintain control over other characters through violence and materialism. Their egocentric attitudes increasingly isolate them from the surrounding community, as a vast array of destructive elements begin to demolish them. Ironically, their attempts to maintain power and control end up having the opposite effect, causing them to become both weakened and vulnerable.

The second chapter focuses on the women in these novels, particularly Clara Trueba (Esteban's wife) and Pilate Dead (Macon's sister). The women have an extremely different society than the men, for in many instances they are busy taking care of spiritual matters. Likewise, they lead their lives according to their own sets of values which are quite contrary to those of the men, but which fill their lives with meaning. The power displayed by the women is much more connected to the spiritual realm than to the

physical one, and endures beyond the brief duration of material power.

The third chapter moves on to explore the children in these novels, concentrating on Alba Trueba (Esteban and Clara's granddaughter) and Milkman Dead (Macon's son). The children are born into worlds of opposing forces and contradictory philosophies and discover that they must develop a whole new set of ideals in order to form their identities. The structural element of both novels winds its way to the end through Alba and Milkman's ritualistic voyages of terrorized awakenings. Through these final stages of the novels Alba and Milkman are reunited with the past, connected to a spiritual realm, and discover new senses of hope for their future destinies. Through their discoveries they symbolically heal and rejuvenate the severed relationship between the patriarchal and matriarchal worlds.

All three chapters examine a conflict between the sexes, a conflict which in many cases is strongly connected to the principles held by both our current patriarchal modes of thinking and the more ancient, yet extremely relevant, matriarchal power structure. In matriarchal societies of the past, women held a much higher social and economic position, and were often worshipped as embodiments of a goddess figure who reigned over both the material and spiritual realm. Today we are much more familiar with how the patriarchal power functions as a world force than with

the ancient matriarchal systems of social organization that once maintained a powerful position. Whereas some of the male characters discussed are traditionally patriarchal, many of the female characters stand out and intrigue us because they embody matriarchal values that have long since been repressed and ignored.

The relationship between Esteban and Clara and the relationship between Macon and Pilate are representative of forces at odds with one another. James Grove says of The House of the Spirits:

> The novel clearly has many layers of meaning, and the marriage between Clara and Esteban Trueba rests at the heart of its complexity. Their relationship, a mismatch, enables Allende to examine two radically different ways of perceiving and reacting to a violent, often inexplicable world. Specifically, she plays Clara's respect for the integrity of the individual and for the magical side of life off of Esteban's authoritarian machismo. Through this contrast, she exposes the limitations and dangers of the patriarchal power structure prevalent in Latin America.
>
> (Grove, 456)

This contrast between Clara and Esteban parallels the relationship between Pilate and Macon. As critic Betty Gawthrop notes:

> Contrasted to Macon Dead's greed, suspicion, and self-righteousness is his sister Pilate's openness, trust and love. She is all that he is not. She lives in the utmost simplicity, with generosity, kindness, and love motivating all her actions. Macon cannot accept her love, her generosity, her ethics, nor her forgiveness.
>
> (Gawthrop, 791)

It is important to point out that the basic ideas of matriarchy and patriarchy are not in complete opposition to one another since neither system is entirely evil or good.

Although researchers speculate that matriarchal societies offered men an important role in communal affairs, other accounts reveal that men were sacrificed on a regular basis after having slept with Queens, and on many occasions they were castrated. But for the most part, matriarchal societies are thought to have offered much more freedom to both men and women, as this system enforced no rigid sexual codes that the patriarchal rule later established to repress women.

The matriarchal powers existing in the patriarchal dominated societies of these novels create a fascinating dynamic that inevitably changes the roles that both the women and men assume. Women, as we see through many examples in these works, take on greater freedoms, while men accept more emotional responsibility by opening their hearts to the women in their lives and handing over some of their long guarded dominion, or rule. The men and women develop more balanced relationships with one another and/or with themselves as a direct result of the patriarchy yielding some of its power to the women.

Although the patriarchal rule still exists as a powerful force by the end of these novels, in many ways it has been seriously weakened. The changes that occur on an individual level offer hope that change can occur on other levels as well. Many characters realize that they must stop the vicious cycle of violence and greed that has existed for

so long. They realize that their personal contributions to ending this cycle are significant and essential, and that through love and understanding they can help to heal the wounds of the past.

CHAPTER ONE

The Patriarchal Paradox of Esteban Trueba and Macon Dead

Perhaps none of the various characters in Isabel Allende's novel The House of the Spirits and Toni Morrison's novel Song of Solomon arouse such an extreme array of emotions in the reader as the characters of Esteban Trueba and Macon Dead. The anger, fear and suffering that both these men subject the other characters to is impossible to ignore, and is often overwhelming in its nature. Both men cause such turmoil within their families and their communities that they end up severing nearly all of their emotional ties, while at the same time securing and increasing both financial and political gains. Yet these material riches are never enough to satisfy their desires because the more they get, the more they want. They are never completely satisfied with their prominent positions in society as the wealth they gather only touches the surface of the emotional needs that are deep within them and which stir beyond their control. This desire for wealth and power limits them to shallow existences of loneliness and frustration, making them even more dependent on their violent means of interacting with other people.

Although neither author hesitates to show how nasty the patriarch can be, there is much in these novels to suggest

that these authors did not intend to present these men as entirely evil. There are patches of narrative in both works that describe these men as complex human beings who occasionally do reflect on the significance and the consequence of their actions. Although the granddaughter Alba tells the story of the Truebas, Allende gives Esteban a first person narrative voice for many pages throughout the novel during which time he is able to tell his own story. Morrison similarly allows us to get inside the mind of Macon at moments when he is both tender and almost likeable. This insight reveals in part the tragic paradox of these men's situations, for the more we are able to understand the deeper psychology of their minds, the more we realize how little they understand about the world around them and what frightened human beings they really are.

Both Esteban and Macon possess infamous tempers, and everyone who comes in contact with them cannot help but feel threatened by them. Their temperaments, so similar in nature, also inflict a great deal of damage on their own personal well-beings by creating a distance between themselves and others that becomes nearly impossible to mend. In turn, they are alienated from the intimacies of those around them and are unable to share in a communal knowledge that is so easily available to everyone else. The roots of their violent personalities are difficult to uncover or pinpoint, yet seem to be strongly connected to

their impoverished and sometimes violent childhoods during which time they both became possessed with a motivation to succeed, no matter what the cost. In this chapter I will first examine these men's violence as an alienating and self-destructive force within their families and communities, and will then attempt to show how devastated they become by the very systems that they have helped to create and from which they derive power.

Esteban and Macon set out to marry wealthy women, and in order to be acceptable suitors, they must demonstrate sufficient financial stability. For Esteban this means he must commit to work indefinitely in a wretched mine in a distant town. He wishes to marry Rosa the Beautiful, whose sudden death devastates him, forcing him to move back home. Years later he redirects his intense love to Rosa's sister Clara, who agrees to marry him even though she is not in love with him. For Macon, marriage is much more a financial investment than a venture into love. He marries the wealthiest black woman in town, the Doctor's daughter, Ruth. Later he expresses to his son that "I can't tell you I was in love with her. People didn't require that as much as they do now" (Morrison, Song, 70). Although there are descriptions of intense sensuality and pleasure between Macon and Ruth during the early years of their marriage, we learn that early on in their relationship they began to feel completely repelled by one another's presence, and

eventually there was not even the sexual pleasure to give them some means of connecting with one another.

Ambrose Gordon, in his essay entitled "Isabel Allende on Love and Shadow," sees Esteban as the central figure in Allende's novel.

> The House of the Spirits has no hero, but its central character is Esteban Trueba, whom we follow--intermittently, with interruptions for the various spin-off stories--for more than seventy of his ninety years. Since Esteban is the most purposeful character present, he is also the most intelligible. He is destined for defeat by his willfulness and bad disposition. The constants of his life are love and rage. He wields with great effectiveness a silver cane (against china and glasses and bric-a-brac), a whip (against his daughter, when he discovers that she is pregnant by one of the peasants on his estate), a fist against Clara, when she speaks up in defense of the daughter--knocking out all her front teeth--and, with somewhat less effectiveness, an ax against the daughter's lover, missing the head but severing three of his fingers. If Esteban represents pure will, Clara, his wife, appears to be all sensibility. She is a more ambiguous and uncertain character.
>
> (Gordon, 532-533)

Esteban may dominate the material world of the novel, but Clara is definitely at the center of the spiritual realm which Esteban can barely penetrate. For Esteban, Clara's sensuality never even comes close to fulfilling him, but like Macon, he lacks the ability to communicate on a deeper level. Esteban has a deep love and respect for Clara yet can only express his feelings by forcing his will upon her, just as he forces it on the rest of his family and tenants. Shortly after his marriage he realizes that Clara will never belong to him in the manner in which he would like. Allende writes: "Clara's impudent and nonchalant sensuality was also not enough for him. He wanted far more than her body; he

wanted control over that undefined and luminous material that lay within her and that escaped him even in those moments when she appeared to be dying of pleasure" (Allende, 96). He is driven out of his mind with anger towards her because she gradually starts to distance herself from him. She begins to keep her door locked at night so that he won't be able to sleep with her, and even on the occasions when he forces her to sleep with him against her will, his actions make him feel frustrated because she does not seem to be present in her body.

He also abuses her verbally, but this has basically little effect on her. Clara's calm disposition allows her to ignore his temper tantrums, which makes him feel even more powerless and out of control. Although she obeys many of his demands with outward compliance, he knows that he cannot come close to gaining control over the world inside her mind. Gordon states: "Esteban Trueba, whom she was scarcely forced to marry, is not a man she ever loves, and after they are married, becomes a man from whom she increasingly withdraws into the more congenial company of the spirits" (Gordon, 533). The following description of Esteban's reaction when he discovers that Clara is spreading feminist ideals to the tenants is a wonderful example of the dynamics that exist between Esteban and Clara.

> It was the first time he had ever been angry with Clara and the first time she saw him have one of his famous tantrums. He shouted like a madman, pacing up and down the living room and slamming his fist against the furniture, arguing that if

> Clara intended to follow in her mother's footsteps she was going to come face to face with a real man, who would pull her pants down and give her a good spanking so she'd get it out of her damned head to go around haranguing people, and that he categorically forbade her to go to prayer meetings or any other kind and that he wasn't some ninny whose wife could go around making a fool of him. Clara let him scream his head off and bang on the furniture until he was exhausted. Then, inattentive as ever, she asked him if he knew how to wiggle his ears.
>
> (Allende, 106)

He attempts to play the part of the all powerful father figure, and sees not only Clara but nearly everybody else as his children who are incapable of making their own decisions, impelling him to tell them how to act and what to think. The above example clearly shows that Clara has little respect for Esteban's dominating tactics, and likewise responds with a statement that does not even acknowledge the fact that he has said anything to begin with. Her questioning if he can wiggle his ears shifts the entire context of the conversation to a ridiculous level, as if nothing he has said is even comprehensible or worth her energy.

The one mistake that Esteban lives to regret is the day he punches Clara in the mouth after she compares his own actions to those of Pedro Tercero Garcia, their child Blanca's lover. Esteban cannot handle the truth when Clara strongly insinuates that he has slept with other women too, but not out of love for them. This drives him into a fit of crazed anger at which time he punches her in the mouth, and then instantly regrets his action.

> Trueba stared at her, paralyzed with surprise. For a second his fury seemed to deflate, and he felt as if she were making fun of him, but a wave of blood immediately rushed to his brain. He lost control and struck her in the face, knocking her against the wall. Clara fell to the floor without a sound. Esteban seemed to awaken from a trance. He knelt by her side, crying and begging her forgiveness, trying to explain, calling her by all the special names he used only when they were in bed, not understanding how he could have raised his hand against her, the only human being he really cared about and for whom he had not even in the worst moments of their common life, lost respect. He picked her up in his arms, seated her lovingly in an armchair, wet a handkerchief to put on her forehead, and tried to make her drink a little water. Finally Clara opened her eyes. Blood was flowing from her nose. When she opened her mouth, she spat out several teeth, which fell to the floor, and a thread of bloody saliva trickled down her chin and neck.
>
> (Allende, 201)

At this point Esteban realizes clearly that his actions against Clara are irrevocable, and he is filled with such extreme remorse that he gets on the floor and cries for her forgiveness. But for Clara this act ends their marriage. She chooses never to speak to him again, stops using their married name, and takes off her wedding ring. She realizes the futile cycle of temper that Esteban is attempting to catch her up in, a cycle he returns to almost immediately following this episode. Although he momentarily regrets his violent action towards her, he wastes no time in offering a reward to anyone who will tell him where Pedro Tercero Garcia is hiding, so he can kill him. Thus, the vicious cycle of his violence continues.

Esteban comes to understand partially the consequences of his actions towards Clara because he must live with the fact that she will not speak to him, even though he works so

hard at getting her to say something. But Esteban is in no way willing to see the connection between this violent action and his violence towards other family members and his tenants, which trigger similar feelings of alienation and regret. He continually wreaks havoc among the people who live on his inherited estate, Trés Marias, where he goes to live before getting married. When he arrives at this estate where the people are living in extreme poverty, he attempts to teach them the right way to live. Some of his improvements within the tenant's community do appear to be of value, for he teaches the people about nutrition and sanitation. Yet he imposes more negative conditions on his tenants than positive ones, filling them with complete fear of his double sided regimen. As he grows wealthier, he basically shares none of this wealth with his tenant workers, whom he enslaves through financial dependency. He leaves them with no choice but to follow his every demand or leave the hacienda. He has absolutely no respect for their ways, and once again deems himself as the ultimate father figure by referring to them as poor creatures. He tries to convince himself that he is really helping them out, and he is quoted as saying:

> If it weren't for me, they'd be lost. If we go to the heart of the matter, they're useless even for running errands. As I've always said, they're like children. There's not one of them can do what he's supposed to do without me there behind him driving him on. And then they start in on me with the story that we are all equal! It's enough to make you die laughing!
>
> (Allende, 65)

Esteban's relationship with the tenants is much more ruthless than his relationship with his family. His anger severs any friendships he might have formed with his workers and causes the people to grow weary of attempting to reason with him on any rational level. Near the beginning of the novel, Esteban rapes numerous young girls that he encounters on and around his hacienda. He doesn't think twice about attacking these women because he has an uncontrollable sexual urge and this drive is all that matters to him. He not only violates the female tenants that are economically dependent on him, but forcibly rapes young girls from neighboring haciendas whenever he desires. Nobody is able to confront him effectively for fear of his/her own safety, as the tenants are convinced that Esteban is guilty of murdering people who have placed accusations upon him, something he later denies. The tenants are thus unable to express directly their disgust with Esteban, though criticizing is easy for Clara because of her position and her magical powers.

> The Peasants hid their daughters and clenched their fists helplessly because they could not confront him. Esteban Trueba was stronger, and he had impunity. Twice the bullet-riddled bodies of peasants from other haciendas were discovered. There was not the shadow of a doubt in anybody's mind that the guilty one was from Trés Marias, but the rural police simply recorded that bit of information in their record book with the tortured hand of the semi-literate, adding that the victims had been caught committing a theft. The matter never went any further. Trueba continued polishing his reputation as a rake, sowing the entire region with his bastard offspring, reaping hatred, and storing up sins

> that barely nicked him because he had hardened his soul and silenced his conscience with the excuse of progress.
>
> (Allende, 63)

Esteban is never satisfied with his domination over the tenants, and he comes to find out later in the novel that they have plotted against him by aiding Pedro Tercero Garcia, whom Esteban considers the greatest enemy of all due to his socialist ideals and his love for Esteban's daughter, Blanca.

Pedro is the only tenant who openly defies Esteban by inspiring the tenants to stand up for their rights. Esteban bans Pedro from stepping foot on Trés Marias because of his rebellious ways, but Pedro becomes a hero for all the people who still reside there. After Esteban finds out that Pedro has actually slept with Blanca, he is irate. This is the same type of anger he uses to knock out Clara's teeth. Esteban succeeds in causing irreparable injury to Pedro as well when he chops off three of his fingers with an axe. Yet even before he sets out to kill Pedro, he admits that he is much more sad than angry. He writes that "at moments sadness swept over me, stronger than the fury I had been hatching all this time, stronger than the hatred I felt for Pedro Tercero Garcia" (Allende, 204). He feels that his sorrow is a sign of weakness and considers it a lapse from which he must recover through acts of violence. When he encounters Pedro and chops off his fingers, he is weakened

once again by desperation and has to try very hard to remember how angry he had been. In the narrative he states:

> It took me several minutes to calm down and realize that I hadn't killed him. My first reaction was one of relief, because the feel of his warm blood on my face had quickly taken the edge off of my hatred, and I had to make a real effort to remember how badly I had wanted to kill him to explain the violence that was suffocating me, making my chest nearly burst, my ears buzz, and my eyes cloud over.
>
> (Allende, 206)

In his attempt to satisfy himself by destroying any person or thing that makes him angry, he only ends up with feelings of emptiness and sadness. He remains ignorant of these vital connections until the end of the book when he is near death.

Macon Dead, like Esteban, uses anger to protect himself from his own feelings and emotions as well as those of other people. The narrator explains that Macon became numb when he witnessed his father's assassination, and as we piece together Macon's childhood, we find that this tragic event radically changed Macon's disposition and value system. The narrator writes:

> The numbness that had settled on him when he saw the man he loved and admired fall off the fence; something wild ran through him when he watched the body twitching in the dirt. His father had sat for five nights on a split-rail fence cradling a shotgun and in the end died protecting his property.
>
> (Morrison, Song, 51)

Prior to the death of his father, Macon has close relationships with both his father and his sister Pilate, but shortly after his father dies, Macon becomes estranged from Pilate. Initially, Macon and Pilate remain together,

first hiding out with Circe, a friend of the family who lives nearby, and then camping out in the woods, where Macon kills a man who is sleeping in the same cave. Macon panics and desperately wishes to hide what he has done. "He wanted the dead man to disappear, to be covered, hidden, to be gone" (Morrison, Song, 170), just as he must have felt as he watched his father twitching on the ground. Macon then discovers small bags of gold, which take his mind entirely off the murder he has just committed and the loss he feels over his father's death.

> Life, safety, and luxury fanned out before him like the tailspread of a peacock, and as he stood there trying to distinguish each delicious color, he saw the dusty boots of his father standing just on the other side of the shallow pit.
>
> (Morrison, Song, 170)

While Pilate acknowledges her father's presence, Macon begins piling up the sacks of gold. Macon chooses to steal the gold rather than communicate with his father, a choice he lives with and defends for the rest of his life. As a result of his decision, he never sees his father again while Pilate continues to see apparitions of her father and to view him as a mentor. Macon's decision to value the gold over his father also causes a separation between himself and Pilate since Pilate feels it is wrong to take gold which does not belong to them. Macon places such great importance on the gold because it helps him forget how painful love and admiration can be, how these feelings naturally make him vulnerable.

The violent act of killing this stranger causes a major shift in Macon, for now he has become like the white men who left his own father "twitching on the ground." There is the sense that this is an act of revenge because of the similar ways in which the bodies--the body of his father and the body of the man in the cave--react to death. Later in the novel, when Macon's son Milkman thinks of his father, the narrator writes:

> And his father. An old man now, who acquired things and used people to acquire more things. As the son of Macon Dead the First, he paid homage to his own father's life and death by loving what that father had loved: property, good solid property, the bountifulness of life. He loved these things to excess because he loved his father to excess. Owning, building, acquiring--that was his life, his future, his present, and all the history he knew. That he distorted life, bent it, for the sake of gain, was a measure of his loss at his father's death.
>
> (Morrison, Song, 300)

Even though Macon's father had loved his children and had attempted to instill them with a sense of pride and family, he had also loved "property" and "the bountifulness of life." He had given his children a contradictory message; he denied them their heritage by forbidding anyone to mention his wife's name (Macon and Pilate's mother). His message implied that the dead should be forgotten, that the dead were too painful to acknowledge, that it was somehow better to concentrate on the material world instead. Macon obsesses over the gold and the luxury it will provide him in an attempt to fill the void left after his father's death, similar to his father's own attempt to wipe out the past.

Likewise, Macon is unable to really love anyone after this event. He never feels much love or respect for his wife, Ruth, and admits that from the beginning of their marriage he never really loved her. For him, marriage is another financial arrangement, which moves him one step further up the ladder of success. Shortly after their marriage he develops a growing suspicion that Ruth is secretly much more devoted to her father than she is to him. His first realization comes when Dr. Foster insists on delivering Ruth's babies, an arrangement which seems highly incestuous to him, and he says that "I knew then they'd ganged up on me forever--the both of them--and no matter what I did they managed to have things their way" (Morrison, Song, 71). His jealousy over Ruth's relationship with her father damages his pride so severely that he eventually refuses to sleep with her, except for the few occasions when he succumbs to have sex with her under the magic potion Ruth slips him secretly.

Whereas Esteban can never get enough of Clara's person, Macon wants nothing more than to encounter the surface of Ruth, perhaps a sign of his fear of intimacy. He possesses no deep enchantment with her and is described as enjoying her undergarments much more than he ever enjoys her body. As soon as he completes the slow process of "untying, unclasping, unbuckling the snaps and strings of what must have been the most beautiful, the most delicate, the whitest

and softest underwear on earth" (Morrison, Song, 16), he quickly ejaculates and ends their lovemaking without the slightest caress of her body itself. Morrison writes of Macon: "In almost twenty years during which he had not laid eyes on her naked feet, he missed only the underwear" (Morrison, Song, 16). Macon protects this distance that exists between himself and Ruth through violence towards both his family and many other people in the community. This distance isolates him, never allowing him to learn the truth that could potentially set him free from his inner turmoil. For example, although he despises Ruth, based entirely on his suspicions about her relationship with her father, he never confronts her about it and likewise his suspicions grow all the wilder. He is much more afraid of what he doesn't know than the illusion of reality where he is so angrily hiding. In Valerie Smith's essay titled "The Quest for and Discovery of Identity in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon," Smith writes: "The avid materialism and rugged individualism that made Macon financially successful have extracted their price from him in other ways, however. Macon has come to believe that money, property and keys are what is real in the world; his financial success has thus cost him his capacity for communication and emotion" (Smith, 726).

For the most part, Macon's suspicions about Ruth's relationship with her father blight both their lives and

ruin their relationship with one another. Betty Gawthrop writes:

> When finally the mother tells her version of the relationship she had with her father, Milkman and the reader are finally able to fit the confusing pieces together and see the situation with compassion and with despair--despair because there is no love to heal the breach between the husband and wife, despair because the anger and outrage at being rejected have poisoned them and are destroying their capacity to love and grow.
>
> (Gawthrop, 790)

Their relationship is indeed a tragic one. Macon's inability to love or accept Ruth is another sign of Macon's fear of the truth, which may very well amount to his fear of love itself. If Macon were to find out the truth, that there was never anything sexual between Ruth and her father, he might discover something much more frightening--that Ruth was lovable and that he himself was a person capable of love and vulnerability.

Macon, in many ways, is a more terrifying character than Esteban, for nearly all the members of the Trueba family flourish and remain largely uninhibited by Esteban's rampages. Macon, on the other hand, represses his family and paralyzes them with fear. Ruth does not stand up to Macon in the manner that we can always depend on Clara doing, and both Lena and 1st Corinthians are almost shadows in the weary background of Macon Dead's powerful presence. No one moves unless he allows it, although eventually all the members of his family do rebel against him in some way. But their rebellious actions are relatively small in

comparison with the complete acts of defiance that the Trueba family members commit. One reason for this difference might be the fact that Esteban spends a lot of time away from his family, whereas Macon is never away from his house for more than the work day. While Esteban is away in the country or on business, the women have control over their space and their time. Esteban is almost content in allowing the women in his family to have a great deal of freedom which he only interferes with when he feels they have really stepped out of line. Macon does not allow Ruth or his daughters to do anything without his approval, perhaps resulting from his childhood when everything was so out of control (his father was shot). Now he must feel some sense of control in order to cover up his pain, and his domination over the women in his life results from this obsession to control. Either way there is pain, but if he can control his family and his material reality, at least he can create the illusion of a happy family. If he deals with the real pain of his father's murder, this illusion is shattered and he will only feel the loss again. Whatever the reason, Macon's presence is central to their lives, and due to his domination of their space, they can only build slight lives for themselves around it.

> Solid, rumbling, likely to erupt without prior notice, Macon kept each member of his family awkward with fear. His hatred of his wife glittered and sparked in every word he spoke to her. The disappointment he felt in his daughters sifted down on them like ash, dulling their buttery complexions and choking the lilt out of what should have been

> girlish voices. Under the frozen head of his glance they tripped over doorsills and dropped the salt cellar into the yolks of their poached eggs. The way he mangled their grace, wit, and self-esteem was the single excitement of their days. Without the tension and drama he ignited, they might not have known what to do with themselves. In his absence his daughters bent their necks over blood-red squares of velvet and waited eagerly for any hint of him, and his wife, Ruth, began her days stunned into stillness by her husband's contempt and ended them wholly animated by it.
> (Morrison, Song, 11)

His bitter feelings towards Ruth make him regret that he didn't strangle her back in 1921, right after they were married. As he attempts to justify his violent reaction towards Ruth at the dinner table, he tells his son Milkman about the time he found Ruth in bed with Dr. Foster, who had just died. He tells him that there is "nothing to do but kill a woman like that. I swear, many's the day I regret she talked me out of killing her" (Morrison, Song, 71). At another point, Ruth tells Milkman that Macon didn't kill her because of her money. She states: "Your father and I hadn't had physical relations since my father died, when Lena and Corinthians were just toddlers. We had a terrible quarrel. He threatened to kill me. I threatened to go to the police about what he had done to my father. We did neither. I guess my father's money was more important to him than the satisfaction of killing me" (Morrison, Song, 125). Later, Ruth reflects on Macon's many attempts to abort Milkman forcibly when he was in the womb, describing Macon at one of his most merciless points. Macon is enraged when he realizes that he has been tricked into

sleeping with her by means of some magic that he does not understand.

> But Macon came out of his few days of sexual hypnosis in a rage and later when he discovered her pregnancy, tried to get her to abort. Then the baby became the castor oil Macon made her drink, then a hot pot recently emptied of scalding water on which she sat, then a soapy enema, a knitting needle (she inserted only the tip, squatting in the bathroom, crying, afraid of the man who paced outside the door, and finally, when he punched her stomach (she had been about to pick up his breakfast plate, when he looked at her stomach and punched it), she ran to Southside looking for Pilate.
>
> (Morrison, Song, 131)

It is indeed unnatural that Macon attempts to kill his own offspring, who happens to be the son he later tries to mold into his own likeness. In a sense, he is trying to distance one part of himself from another.

Just as Esteban punches Clara in the mouth after she has said something he doesn't like, Macon is also drawn to uncontrollable violence at Ruth's words. Ruth tells a story at the dinner table that Macon doesn't like, and in turn he suddenly punches her in the mouth. Punching their wives in the mouths seems highly symbolic of these men's powerlessness when faced with the power of their wives' words. When Clara and Ruth are punched, both women are asserting opinions about which they feel rather strongly, and which their husbands are obviously frustrated by. Both Macon and Esteban, instead of attempting to communicate with their wives in a rational manner, use brute strength to repress any potential confrontation with truth, which in both cases is what they are up against. They choose to begin

confrontations of an entirely different nature, using physical strength so they are sure to win. When Milkman throws his father against the wall, Macon is made aware of his ultimate weakness in light of outside forces. "Macon was so shocked at being assaulted he could not speak. He had come to believe, after years of creating respect and fear wherever he put his foot down, after years of being the tallest man in every gathering, that he was impregnable" (Morrison, Song, 67).

Macon attempts to control his family by means of his violent measures, and in the same way he tries to control his tenants. When he is not at home bossing everyone around, he is down in his realty office managing the rents he so ardently demands from his tenants every month. Macon needs to feel in control at all times because this control gives him a sense of security and achievement. Besides, he knows how to deal with issues of control, yet may not know how to handle the other feelings he has repressed inside himself, especially the feelings of loss connected with his father's death. By controlling other people, he is able to control his own feelings as well. Before Milkman comes to work for him, he tells his son where his priorities should lie. "Let me tell you right now the one important thing you'll ever need to know. Own things. And let the things you own own other things. Then you'll own yourself and other people too" (Morrison, Song, 55). Macon thinks he can

own people as he owns property, and he expresses this after he explains that his father was once a "slave." Once again, Macon attempts to recover from the loss of his father and sister by repressing other people. He shows no compassion when dealing with his tenants, and uses his financial power to insure that they make their payments, or face the consequences of being thrown out in the street. When Mrs. Bains comes to his office to tell him that she does not have the money for rent, he sets a cold deadline when the money must be paid. Otherwise she and her grandchildren will no longer have a place to live.

> When Mrs. Bains closed the door, Macon Dead went back to the pages of his account book, running his fingertips over the figures and thinking with the unoccupied part of his mind about the first time he called on Ruth Foster's father. He had only two keys in his pocket then and if he had let people like the woman who just left have their way, he wouldn't have any keys at all.
>
> (Morrison, Song, 22)

But owning houses does not offer him a lasting sense of security. As he walks along the street one evening and looks at his houses, he feels lonely and distanced from them because they don't seem to belong to him. During the day he has office account books to verify his ownership, but at night the houses only serve as reminders of his own emptiness.

> Scattered here and there, his houses stretched up beyond him like squat ghosts with hooded eyes. He didn't like to look at them in this light. During the day they were reassuring to see; now they did not seem to belong to him at all--in fact he felt as though the houses were in league with one

> another to make him feel like the outsider, the property-less, landless wanderer.
>
> (Morrison, Song, 27)

He claims that owning property is the most important thing in life, but it is obvious that the sense of power and control that he derives from his houses does not hold up to the utter meaninglessness of his material life as a whole. Bonnie Barthold, in her book Black Time; Fiction of Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States, writes:

> For Macon Dead, time is money, and the answer to temporal dispossession is the dispossession of others: he literally evicts Guitar Bain's penniless grandmother, and tells Milkman to "own things. Then you'll own yourself and other people too" (p. 55). Like Lamming's Slime, he holds a philosophy equivalent to spiritual death: "Owning, building, acquiring--that was his life, his future, his present, and all the history he knew."
>
> (Barthold, 304)

In an essay titled "Straining to Make Out the Words to the 'Lied': The German Reception to Toni Morrison," Anne Adams points out the complex psychology of a character such as Macon Dead, and reminds us that none of Morrison's characters are to be taken simply. First Adams gives us a view of Macon Dead that fits him well. She writes:

> Or, about Macon Dead, Wedertz-Furtado attributes his disposition at home to the same external cause that governs his relations with his tenants: "Having achieved a considerable amount of material success, holding an outwardly comfortable middle-class position, Macon maintains and increases his status by exploiting the poorer blacks who depend upon him. This shows him to be a classic example of the oppressed adopting the means of the oppressor. The prevalent atmosphere in his house is one of hatred, criticism, and bullying, nipping in the bud any sign of real life.
>
> (Adams, 195)

Although it seems acceptable to say that Macon Dead has taken on the role of the oppressor who is himself oppressed, Adams calls this a reductionist formula that fails to recognize the complexities of the individual which she feels Morrison is analyzing. This argument makes sense because it is more important to analyze Macon as an individual than as a stereotype. She states:

> While we cannot ignore the crippling effect that emulation of the white middle-class model and value system has on the Dead family, this reductionist formula for explaining all behavior of Dead family members ignores Morrison's particular analysis of relationships and motivational complexities of individuals--black individuals. But even more disturbing about this reductionist formula is that it necessarily rests on the "pathology" theory of the black community. Black people's behavior is "aberrant" because they are responding to oppression by the white world.
>
> (Adams, 195)

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I believe that Allende and Morrison carefully created these many layered patriarchal figures, who cannot be narrowly summed up as completely repulsive characters. Both men do, however, possess age-old patriarchal traits. Critic Gina Cerminara comments:

> In primitive, materialistic societies, might makes right, and the strongest can easily impose his will on the others. Because of their superior size and muscular strength, and also because of their greater biological freedom, men have easily established a dominant position over women, and have perpetuated it by laws, customs, and superstitions of infinite variety and even--ironically and tragically enough--by religion.
>
> (Cerminara, 38)

This description easily fits Esteban and Macon, for as we have seen in Esteban's case at least, physical might is

exercised as his most powerful and important asset. Yet one must go beyond these strong images if one truly wishes to understand these dominant male figures and the underlying causes of their repressive attitudes that inevitably lead to their alienation from friends and family. As the novels progress, both men are subjected to degradation by the very systems from which they gain their power, the same systems that created them. They are also devastated by their families on a deep, emotional level because of the ultimate lack of control that they are able to assert over them, with control being the only way they know to communicate. These men do not understand that the patriarchal order, which they are a part of, has been weakened.

Both men gain their prosperous positions almost entirely on their own. Although they are both poor, they are privileged with manhood, a great advantage in any patriarchal system. Each of these men develop a driving ambition to succeed and be wealthy, to overcome any obstacles that might humiliate their sense of manhood, a humiliation they both had experienced at some point in their lives. Esteban's motivation to succeed stems from, in part, his poverty stricken childhood. Allende writes that "his had been a childhood of privations, discomfort, harshness, interminable night-time rosaries, fear and guilt. All that remained of those days was his fury and his outsized pride" (Allende, 46). No sooner does he show signs of

puberty than his mother and sister begin to depend on him entirely for their protection and security. In return he must deal with his sister Ferula's jealous admiration of his position as a male in their society and family, which by birth entitles him to an array of freedoms that will never be available to her as a woman.

Ferula, unlike many of the other women in this novel, seems to misdirect her anger and her sense of futility into a self-destructive mode, instead of learning to cultivate a sense of herself through her feminine powers. Although Ferula imagines herself a saint because of her many sacrifices and is thought to be so by many people, she possesses an evil streak that tars all of her seemingly loving deeds with a sickening motivation. Ferula definitely has reason to be disturbed by her harsh circumstances, but the ironies of her character run as deep as Esteban's, for she displays a completely unselfish attitude on the surface while simultaneously having completely selfish motivations at her core. Allende presents us with one of the many unsolvable complexities of human relationships through Ferula and Esteban, who seem equally to blame for the problems that lie between them. It is as though they are caught in a trap of their own making, from which they can't escape.

> From the time he had begun to work, when he was fifteen, Esteban had supported the household and had promised always to do so, but for Ferula that had not been enough. It bothered her to have to stay locked up within these walls

> that stank of her sick mother, always attentive to the clock so as to administer each dose at the proper time, bored, tired, and unhappy while her brother had no taste of such obligations. Before him lay a destiny that was bright, free, and full of promise. He could marry, have children, know what love was. The day she sent the telegram telling him of Rosa's death she felt a strange shiver, almost of joy.
>
> (Allende, 44)

A large part of Esteban's temperament clearly evolved from the role he was forced to play when he became old enough to work. He was expected to join the work force and support his widowed mother and sister, extracting him from the world of emotions that had engulfed him since childhood. This emotional world had many disadvantages, however, since his mother and sister gave him strong messages that contradicted each other, the main message having to do with the fact that they expected him to go off to work and support them while they simultaneously shunned him for abandoning them. Later, he was expected to live up to the societal standards of a proper suitor for the fairly wealthy del Valle daughter Rosa, which drove him to work with great diligence and effort in a mine, separating him even further from all emotional bonds. It is not until Esteban experiences his strongest emotions ever, after the death of Rosa, that he decides to go to the abandoned Trés Marias, where we see his power and violence run wildly out of control. Esteban's inability to express his emotions, or his lack of opportunity to express them, combined with his expected patriarchal position, filled him with great fear

and sorrow. When he is confronted with Clara's perfectly balanced being, he simply goes crazy inside because she becomes the emblem of everything he lacks. Clara doesn't need anything outside of herself, for she is deeply satisfied with a rich inner life. Yet Esteban desperately needs to control everything outside of him, or else he loses all sense of self and must face the pain he is hiding from.

Throughout The House of the Spirits Esteban increasingly discovers that very little exists outside of him the way he so desperately needs it to. The elements around him keep growing and changing, whereas he seems to yearn for a much more predictable, set reality where all things occur in an extremely orderly fashion. Of course, his family is filled with eccentric characters who live spontaneously and are anything but predictable. All the members of his family are continually rebelling against his conservative philosophies, and nearly all of his tenants are rebellious in this manner as well. After so much asserted effort to change all of them, with age he concentrates all his energy on the conservative party. "He was re-elected senator in every parliamentary election. But he was not interested in power, wealth, or prestige. His one obsession was to destroy what he called 'the Marxist cancer', which was slowly gaining ground among the people" (Allende, 306). Although the conservative party has been fairly good to him thus far, providing him with political power and wealth, this party

was suspected of poisoning Rosa the beautiful with the brandy that was meant for her father, Severo del Valle. It is not until the end of the novel, however, that all the security and meaning that Esteban has fought so hard for is destroyed by the military, who use him for everything he's worth and then forget about him.

Esteban utilizes his power in an ultimately self-destructive way in almost all respects. His natural grandson, Esteban Garcia, comes to request a letter of recommendation because he wants to join the police force. Esteban has no idea that this is his natural grandson because Esteban never gave a second thought to his raping of the tenant women. Esteban decides it will be good to have a friend in the police force, yet it is this man who will rise up to gain revenge on Trueba by torturing his granddaughter, Alba. Allende writes: "Trueba remembered that he still owed him the reward for betraying Pedro Tercero Garcia, and he decided that this was a good occasion to repay the debt and in the process acquire a useful friend in the police force. You never know, he thought; I may need him someday" (Allende, 288). Esteban Garcia is a loathsome character, and is one of Esteban's many illegitimate offspring. Alba, on the other hand, is very loving and expressive, and Esteban himself is eerily linked to her horrific torture through this grandson, a product of his own disturbing

violation. Ambrose Gordon remarks on Trueba's action, stating:

> The most troublesome outcome of his sexual escapades in the environs of Trés Marias was Esteban Garcia, his natural grandson born of an offspring of Pancha Garcia, his first wheatfield victim. After a childhood of deprivation and growing resentment, the grandson has nothing but the grandfather's first name for an inheritance. Since childhood he had wanted to become a policeman. And he became one.
>
> (Gordon, 547)

By the end of the novel, Esteban is forced to awaken to many realizations about the reality of his country and his beliefs because his most vital link to meaning and love, Alba, is abducted by the military. It is through Alba that Esteban begins to see the world around him for what it is, and begins to recognize his irreversible contribution to the chaotic pain and suffering of himself, his family and his country. He describes the thoughts he had expressed to Transito Soto when he was at his wits end, trying to locate Alba.

> I'm sure I have a lot of enemies, all of us politicians have enemies, it's not surprising there should be some maniac out there who wants to torture me by sending me fingers through the mail just when I'm out of my mind about Alba's arrest, to put terrible ideas into my head, and if I weren't at the end of my rope and hadn't exhausted all my other possibilities I wouldn't bother you with this, please, Transito, in the name of our old friendship, have pity on me, I'm just a poor destroyed old man, have pity on me and look for my granddaughter Alba before they send her to me in the mail all cut up in little pieces, I sobbed.
>
> (Allende, 421)

Alba is somehow far enough removed from Esteban's dominating structure that he is able to actually appreciate the importance of her precious being, regardless of her radical

views. He never stops loving her and this seems due in part to his revelations that he is a desperate, lonely old man, and an evolving knowledge that his narrow thinking isn't getting him anywhere. Gordon once again sheds valuable light on the Esteban who begins to unfold by the end of the novel.

> Third in a lineage of strong-willed women, Alba is the human instrument through which Esteban Trueba is made to pay psychologically for a lifetime of large- and small-scale transgressions. That is, instead of retaliating in a direct, physical way against the aged patriarch, Trueba's bastard grandson chooses to punish him through his "legitimate" counterpart: revenge against the privileged by the underprivileged, against the upper-class child of affluence by the peasant-child of want.
>
> (Gordon, 547-548)

The paradox of Macon Dead's predicament is expressed more subtly in Morrison's novel since the end of the story focuses on Milkman's personal awakening and not on Macon's rigid financial and emotional world, the equivalent of which we actually watch deteriorate in Esteban's case. But just because we can chart Esteban's downfall by specific events and repercussions doesn't mean that Macon's world has stuck together any more effectively. Regardless of whether Milkman survives his journey or not, by the end of the novel Macon has, in effect, lost the son that he so desired, the son who could bring him back treasures that he himself had never collected. If Milkman does return to the world of his past, he will not be the ideal son that Macon longs for. Milkman now carries with him the knowledge he has learned about his heritage, and his new sense of identity will never

allow him to place great importance on property and finance. In turn, Macon will not be able to remain encased in his ideas of a transcending, patriarchal order, for his line of power has been very directly cut-off. Milkman and Macon come from a lost line of fathers, for Susan Bird reveals to Milkman that "neither one of them knew their own father, Jake nor Sing. And my own father didn't know his" (Morrison, Song, 322).

Macon's power is crumbling in other ways as well. Ruth, who has only been able to cast a subtle form of power over Macon in the previous scenes in the novel, confronts him with a strength that we haven't seen her display until Hagar dies. At this point, we see how the power has shifted hands, how Ruth has almost miraculously become empowered with a strength that Macon doesn't even question. Simultaneously, Milkman is likewise being empowered, another sign that Macon is losing some of his control over his family. The narrator describes how the neighbors had taken up a collection for Hagar's funeral, but the funds were not nearly enough. She writes of the collections:

> It didn't amount to much, though, and it was touch and go whether she'd have a decent funeral until Ruth walked down to Sonny's Shop and stared at Macon without blinking. He reached into his cash drawer and pulled two twenty-dollar bills and put them down on the desk. Ruth didn't stretch out her hand to pick them up, or even shift her feet. Macon hesitated, then wheeled around in his chair and began fiddling with the combination to his safe. Ruth waited. Macon dipped into the safe three separate times before she unclasped her hands and reached for the money. "Thank you,"

> she said, and marched off to Linden Chapel Funeral Home to make the fastest arrangements possible.
>
> (Morrison, Song, 316)

Here we find that Macon is basically powerless when faced with Ruth's unrelenting determination to get what she wants. His financial tight hold gives way completely to Ruth's unblinking stare, and thus he loses some of his control over his financial security as well.

When Macon's control over his financial assets is weakened, the only thing he has ever really had complete control over, he is faced with a whole new dimension of meaning. This is perhaps the biggest loss of power he will be forced to endure, since he derives nearly all his satisfaction from his material domain. Valerie Smith writes:

> Macon's linear vision of time is also partly responsible for his sense of family and morality. Because he believes that the coherence and significance of his identity lie in his future, he cares only about his relationship to his son. To his patriarchal mind, it is in that connection that the most important genealogical transfer occurs. But Macon has no time whatsoever for any connection that would cause him to exercise his capacity for horizontal or (what would be to him) peripheral vision.
>
> Macon's ability to see the world only in linear, exclusive terms, explains his lack of sympathy in yet other ways. He believes that the ends justify any means; as a result, he excuses his own corruption by considering only the financial profits it brings him. He feels no need to offer Mrs. Bain (one of his tenants) charity because charity will not increase his wealth. And he encourages Milkman and Guitar to steal what he thinks is Pilate's gold, despite the kindness she has shown them all.
>
> (Smith, 729)

This is the last scene in the novel that includes Macon, and he is only mentioned a couple of times more before the novel ends, leaving his future open to speculation. Unlike

Allende's lengthy confessions of Esteban, Morrison leaves many questions unanswered and much unclear. There is little reason to think Macon realizes his mistakes and then dies like Esteban. Macon, it can be assumed, most definitely goes on living, and has only just begun to learn the lessons that lie before him.

It is important to note that Macon exerts power over his family and tenants in the same way that whites exert power over blacks. White men shot Macon's father because they wanted his land, and now Macon deals with this "temporal dispossession" by evicting his tenant, Mrs. Bains, and by attempting to steal the gold from his own sister Pilate. The seven days, who murder innocent white people in order to seek revenge for the murder of black people, exert the same type of power as the white oppressors. Guitar, Milkman's close friend and a member of the seven days, tells Milkman:

> There is a society. It's made up of a few men who are willing to take some risks. They don't initiate anything; they don't even choose. They are as indifferent as rain. But when a Negro child, Negro woman, or Negro man is killed by whites and nothing is done about it by their law and their courts, this society selects a similar victim at random, and they execute him or her in a similar manner if they can.
>
> (Morrison, Song, 154)

This violent revenge does not solve the problem of white oppression, but instead makes the cycle of violence more rampant. Likewise, Macon's harsh treatment of other blacks

works towards the detriment of the black community of which he is a member.

Morrison and Allende expose these patriarchal paradoxes not only within the individual characters of Macon and Esteban, but also on the larger scale of the social structure. One example is clearly drawn at the beginning of Song of Solomon, when the black community is forbidden to call one of their own streets by the name they choose. Signs are posted to clarify that the street must be called Mains Avenue instead of Doctor Street, the name they all know it by. The black people are treated like children by the white people, but they rebel against white authority and call the street "Not Doctor Street." Valerie Smith writes that "the degeneration of the Dead family, and the destructiveness of Macon's rugged individualism, symbolize the invalidity of American, indeed Western values. Morrison's depiction of this family demonstrates the incompatibility of received assumptions and the texture and demands of life in black American communities" (Smith, 727).

In The House of the Spirits, similar contradictions arise within the societal structure. Esteban, like Macon, symbolizes Western values as well with his constant hatred for the communists. Although Esteban has strongly supported the military coup d'etat in his country, he most definitely cannot accept the military's ideologies once they have invaded his own home. He says that "they're going overboard

now and no one can go along with the story about internal security and how you have to eliminate your ideological enemies, they're finishing off everyone, no one can go along with that, not even me, and I was the first to throw corn at the military cadets" (Allende, 419). The more control the military exercises over the people, the more the people lose faith in the government. And even though Alba has been brutally beaten and raped by the military, she realizes that their strength will not last. Alba, after being taken in by a very poor woman after the police release her, states: "I told her she had run an enormous risk rescuing me, and she smiled. It was then I understood that the days of Colonel Garcia and all those like him are numbered, because they have not been able to destroy the spirit of these women" (Allende, 429).

Esteban and Macon do change by the end of the novels, at which point both of them have been touched by forces that are stronger than their own. They have been brought to a level of sensitivity and compassion, and have gained a new respect for the women in their lives. The feminine strength displayed by both Pilate and Clara is closely related to the idea of matriarchal power which is not opposite of patriarchal power but consists of a completely different way of looking at the world. Esteban and Macon have viewed the world as an entity that can be controlled and manipulated through money, violence, power, yet they can only pursue

these goals by divorcing themselves from their emotions. In order to treat their tenants with such degradation, as if they are mere property, these men must completely ignore their own emotions that would force them to examine their actions more consciously. The world of the emotions is the world of truths that both of these men want to avoid at all costs. They are in touch only with their anger, an emotion that functions as a defense so that they do not have to feel other emotions, such as compassion.

Although the world which Pilate and Clara inhabit appears to be the same world as the world of these men, the way they perceive and relate to reality makes their world entirely different. One of the major differences between these two worlds is that the women live spontaneously and play with life as if it were too wonderfully chaotic to attempt to control, while the men seem to enjoy themselves rarely, to feel threatened by the unexpected and the natural flow of life. Likewise, Pilate and Clara let their emotions come and go as they please, neither one harboring any real grievance about past events or fears about what is to come in the future. In this respect, these two worlds are entirely different.

The major change that occurs in these men is a change in perspective. For Esteban, in particular, all the tactics he has used to uphold his standards of control have been diminished, and his idea that he can control all of these

outside forces and profit somehow from them is no longer the case. By the end of the novel, all he has left is his granddaughter Alba and this is the most emotional and open human bond he has ever known. He learns to confront his own fears and sorrows after he learns to empathize with Alba's pain. With a variety of changes occurring simultaneously in his life, his perspective is altered drastically and he is a changed man. With Macon, the change is less obvious and for the most part can only be speculated upon.

The matriarchal tradition, a belief system held by both Pilate and Clara, accepts the chaotic world order and attempts to deal with life impulsively, without judgement, without depriving others in order to reach personal goals. In an ideal matriarchal society women hold leadership positions, which is exactly what Pilate and Clara do. They are much greater leaders in their communities than Esteban and Macon can ever dream of being, mainly due to their abilities to feel compassion towards other human beings. Throughout most of the novel, Esteban and Macon deny themselves any act of compassion or love, and thus the bonds they form with people are more often than not bonds that deal with the financial, or material world. These bonds lack meaning and starve these men of any true connection with other human beings, or with life itself. It is the patriarchal system that divides and separates the world into little manageable segments that can be controlled, bought

and sold, and in order to divide and control, all things in life must be judged and given a price.

Through Esteban and Macon, Allende and Morrison are able to show the inevitable failure of the traditional patriarchal system in which the male dominates and controls the society, the family and in particular the women. These novels suggest that the only hope for a peaceful society in the future is a society in which women are free to express their ideas and gain control over their own destinies.

CHAPTER TWO

Women of Wisdom and Magic

The patriarchal world of Esteban Trueba and Macon Dead most clearly becomes a paradox when we compare it to the world of the women in these novels, particularly to the world of Clara and Pilate. These women rely on a different form of power from that of their male counterparts, and exist in a realm of consciousness in which material prestige and social position are of very little concern. Clara and Pilate focus their energies on matters of the spirit and view the material side of their existences as secondary to the reality existing beyond this world. Although these women play somewhat different roles in the structures of their families, they are undeniably strong and have an unforgettable effect on all the other characters in the novels. They are respected by everyone and become legends because of their mysterious strengths and powers.

Pilate is the estranged sister of Macon and Clara is the actual wife of Esteban, but these slightly different roles do not detract from their numerous similarities. Both women have an extraordinary sense of self, which remains largely undisturbed by the senseless rantings and ravings of the men in their lives. This female strength endures long after the patriarchal violence begins to self-destruct.

Neither of these women are interested in domestic affairs, social etiquette or personal hygiene, but instead possess animal characteristics such as instinct and naturalness. They are grandmothers who carry their heritages with them, passing on stories about their ancestors. They are able to predict the future and accept the past, and to change the physical reality surrounding them with the powers of their minds.

Allende describes in detail the character of Clara, while Morrison gives a less detailed account of her character Pilate. Both women are extremely strong figures and are thus unable to be controlled and manipulated by men such as Esteban and Macon, and by the patriarchal hierarchy of the societies in which they live. They have created their own worlds where they can live peaceable lives and never lose sight of what is really important to them. In this chapter I will examine the feminine powers exhibited particularly by Clara and Pilate, and will argue that the women in these novels possess powers that exceed and overcome the forceful powers of the men.

After reading historical accounts of ancient matriarchal societies, I cannot help but connect both Clara and Pilate with the customs and practices of that time. These women are independent to the point that they do not need to rely on men for anything, and actually have power over the men in their lives. They are able to function

within their households and communities as equals with the men, and are respected and admired by the members of their communities. Rosalind Miles defines matriarchy in the following way:

> 'Matriarchy' is better understood as a form of social organization which is woman-centered, substantially egalitarian, and where it is not considered unnatural or anomalous for women to hold power and to engage in all the activities of the society alongside the men. On that definition, in the 4,000 years or so between the emergence of the first civilizations and the coming of the One God (as Buddha, Christ or Allah), matriarchies abounded; and even societies clearly under the rule of men displayed strong matriarchal features in the form of freedoms since lost and never regained by the vast number of women in the state of world "advancement" that we know today.
>
> (Miles, 28)

Pilate and Clara are unique in that they have regained their freedom in the form of both thought and action. Pilate runs a winehouse, an unusual job for a woman in that environment to undertake, and she is never bothered by the police since she doesn't allow the corruptions that most winehouses are full of, such as women and song. Clara is free to read tarot cards and practice various supernatural feats, which are described by Esteban as silly interests. But really he knows all too well that Clara has a deep, rich, inner life that is completely foreign to him.

There are also many traces of matrilineal descent in the lives of these women and their daughters. Although the terms "matriarchy" and "matrilineality" have meanings that overlap, matrilineality is a term that refers more specifically to a family structure in which inheritance

occurs through the female line, as opposed to the male line, which is where inheritance usually takes place in a patriarchal society. It is important to mention this aspect of the matriarchal tradition because so much is inherited through the female line in these novels. Merlin Stone defines matrilineality in the following way:

> Matrilineality is generally defined as that societal structure in which inheritance takes place through the female line, sons, husbands or brothers gaining access to title and property only as the result of their relationship to the woman who is the legal owner. Matrilineal descent does not mean matriarchy, which is defined as women in power, as the head of the family, taking this position in community or state government as well.
>
> (Stone, 32)

Pilate is most strongly connected to matrilineal descent for the obvious reason that there are no men in her household and that therefore the women--herself, her daughter and granddaughter--have legal title to all of their property. The men that Pilate has known were fairly unimportant figures in her life, and thus she was able to pursue her goals and move on with her life. Pilate is definitely not living by the standards that the patriarchal regime expects of women. Whereas Pilate would fit in beautifully in a matriarchal world, in the patriarchal society she is an outcast from the start.

> To the children of the patriarchy, "mother" always includes "wife"; mother is the woman who is married to father. That puts a further constraint on the idea of the good mother. The good mother does not sleep around. She does not even choose the one man she does have, but is chosen by father. Hence the insoluble paradox of the Goddess for the custodi-

> ans of succeeding moralities--she was always unmarried and never chaste.
>
> (Miles, 24)

According to Rosalind Miles' statement, Pilate is more closely related to the Goddess status than to the "good mother" and "wife" demanded by patriarchy.

Clara is also very much involved in a matrilineal line of descent, starting with her mother before her who had equal say in her household. Another definition of matrilineality by Merlin Stone offers further clarification on the subject:

> Accounts of descent in the family would be kept through the female line, going from mother to daughter, rather than from father to son, as is the custom practiced in western societies today. Such a social structure is generally referred to as matrilineal, that is, based upon mother-kinship. In such cultures (known among many "primitive" people even today, as well as in historically attested societies at the time of classical Greece) not only the names, but titles, possessions and territorial rights are passed along through the female line, so that they may be retained within the family clan.
>
> (Stone, 12)

Since patriarchy is still the dominant force in the society, the children are given their father's last name. But Clara is able to name her daughter and granddaughter after herself and after Nivea (her mother), names meaning "white" or "clarity". Clara passes on her jewels to her daughter and is looked to as the head of the household by all the family members, even to some extent, by her reckless and dominating husband. Ironically, Esteban never considers passing his estate on to one of his sons, but instead plans to leave everything to Alba, his granddaughter. He has absolutely no

firm relationship with his sons, and in many ways despises them. Clara, her daughter Blanca, and her granddaughter Alba, on the other hand, are extremely close and form the strongest bond in the household.

In an article titled "A Growing Awareness of Sexual Oppression in the Novels of Contemporary Latin American Women Writers," Maureen Shea comments that in The House of the Spirits by Isabel Allende, "the perspective of the female narrator brings to light similar patterns that are emerging in Latin American works written by women, especially the concentration on patriarchal abuse of the female body and psyche, and the female bonding created to struggle against that abuse in specific socio-historic moments" (Shea, 53). In the context of Allende's novel, it is certainly true that the women must bond together in order to survive the harsh treatment they receive from many of the men. The plight of the women exists for rich and poor alike, and often unites various classes of women in a common struggle for emancipation from their sufferings. Nivea, the first woman in a long line of strong-willed women in the novel, attempts to affect change by participating in demonstrations for equal rights for women. Yet she is ignorant of many factors that the generations of women to follow will recognize, for the wealthy women she meets with are more concerned with social prestige than they are with

gaining women's rights. Allende writes that Clara, Nivea's daughter, saw the obvious hypocrisy in her mother's actions:

> Despite her tender age and complete ignorance of matters of this world, Clara grasped the absurdity of the situation and wrote in her notebook about the contrast of her mother and her friends, in their fur coats and suede boots, speaking of oppression, equality, and rights to a sad, resigned group of hard-working women in denim aprons, their hands red with chilblains. From the factory the ladies would move on to the tea-room on the Plaza de Armas, where they would stop for tea and pastries and discuss the progress of their campaign, not for a moment letting this frivolous distraction divert them from their flaming ideals.
>
> (Allende, 81)

By the time Nivea's great-granddaughter Alba faces her country's political unrest, the class barriers are being swiftly wiped away from the Trueba family at last, especially for the women. The many ideas of Alba's mother Blanca, her grandmother, Clara, and her uncles, Jaime and Nicholas, contribute greatly to her realization that people are often separated by unnecessary sex and class barriers. Alba experiences a communal bond with women from every walk of life, particularly when she spends time in prison. The comfort that these women are able to offer her, and the hope that her grandmother brings her in a vision, provide her with an inner strength to go on living even though her physical body is close to death. The knowledge that other women have endured similar torture at the hands of the soldiers bonds Alba to these women because they are all victims of intense patriarchal abuse. Maureen Shea comments that "these women, who have also been raped, tortured, and mutilated, care for Alba, instilling in her a sense of

responsibility and teaching her the importance of female solidarity as a means to overcome patriarchal evil" (Shea, 58). Female solidarity has a great healing power, demonstrated by the women in prison who help Alba to go on with her life after being so abused.

Female solidarity is expressed by other women in the novel as well. Clara bonds with her spiritual friends, the three Mora Sisters, who form an underground society where knowledge is shared and magic is practiced. Transito Soto, the prostitute that Esteban Trueba has many encounters with, works her whole life dreaming of forming a cooperative in which prostitutes can live and work respectfully, a dream that eventually comes true. Hermione Lee points out the following:

> It is the women--not just the family line of Rosa, Clara, Blanca and Alba, but all kinds of others: servant, prostitute, spiritualist, peasant prisoner--whose spirits, we are finally told, cannot be destroyed by dictatorship and oppression. So magic, at first apparently an indulgence, becomes at the last a form of resistance, a way of reclaiming the past and overcoming fear.
>
> (Lee, 39)

Clara is largely responsible for setting this wheel of change in motion, and she possesses such power and wisdom that she becomes a natural leader for the other women in the novel. She is a teacher of the greatest importance, and sets an unforgettable example for generations to come through her compassion towards humanity and her non-judgmental attitude. Her creative actions and ideas open up

a whole new world of possibilities that everyone can partake of and benefit from.

There are also many incidences of female bonding in Morrison's novel, Song of Solomon. In Morrison's world, the women we are introduced to have a very difficult time coming together and are therefore unable to share much of their knowledge and life experiences. Two of the main characters, Pilate and Ruth, are kept apart by Macon, who feels powerless and confused when the two women are together. He does not understand what is happening between them, and their mysterious relationship threatens him. Pilate offers Ruth hope and strength at one of her more desperate points by bringing her a secret potion that Ruth gives to Macon to sexually arouse him. Once Ruth gets pregnant, Pilate works her magic in other ways in order to prevent Macon from harming the unborn child. Macon commands Pilate to get out of their life, and so she does, thus breaking the bond between the two women. Ruth tells her son Milkman about Pilate: "I wouldn't have been strong enough without her. She saved my life. And yours, Macon. She saved yours too. She watched you like you were her own. Until your father threw her out" (Morrison, Song, 126).

Here, too, the class barriers become nonexistent for the women in the community. Ruth, who is wealthy, has no problem relating to Pilate, who has no money. They also begin to disappear for Milkman when he visits Pilate and

realizes that people can be rich in other ways. "And while she looked as poor as everyone said she was, something was missing from her eyes that should have confirmed it" (Morrison, Song, 38). Although Ruth is the wealthy doctor's daughter and wife to the prosperous Macon, she can barely contain the sense of awe and respect she feels for Pilate, who has helped her to stand up to Macon's unacceptable behavior. Morrison comments on the similarities between Pilate and Ruth: "Their similarities were profound. Both were vitally interested in Macon Dead's son, and both had close and supportive posthumous communication with their fathers" (Morrison, Song, 139). Macon, however, feels threatened and disgraced because Pilate is both poor and unconventional. Ruth, who throughout most of the novel remains fragile and manipulative, reciprocates Pilate's favors later in the novel by getting money from Macon for Pilate's granddaughter's funeral. When Ruth approaches Macon for money, he is reluctant as usual. Ruth, on the other hand, realizes a new sense of self when she is faced with Pilate's financial need to bury her granddaughter. It is as if Ruth taps the source of Pilate's strength in order to get what she needs from Macon. Ruth, for the first time, is not willing to take "no" for an answer.

The narrator informs us on the first page of The House of the Spirits that the story about to be told has been taken from the notebooks of Clara, which she began writing

as a child. Clara used her notebooks to record events that occurred within her family, and that later enable her granddaughter Alba to draw this story from. The story begins with Clara's childhood, on a "bland autumnal day" when the del Valle family is attending mass. As Father Restrepo is angrily lecturing and accusing the parishioners, the small voice of Clara del Valle blurts out "Psst! Father Restrepo! If that story about hell is a lie, we're all fucked, aren't we . . ." (Allende, 7). Everyone is silent as Señor del Valle quickly ushers his family out of church, with Father Restrepo's authoritative voice yelling after them, "Possessed . . . She's possessed by the devil" (Allende, 7).

Clara is completely uninhibited by authority from the very beginning. This outburst during Mass ingrains itself in the family memory for years to come, while Clara simply records it in her notebook and forgets all about it. Clara displays a very important characteristic here which freely allows her to create a world of her own imaginative making without fear of other people's reprisals. To her, the scenario with the priest is only one more event to be recorded in her notebook, and holds absolutely no significance to reality as she knows it. Meanwhile, at home, she is busy moving saltcellars around the table with her mental power and predicting earthquakes and family accidents.

The family is not as disturbed by the child's strangeness as Father Restrepo is. They do, however, try to hide her unique powers from guests, and her mother, Nivea, expresses slight concern when her daughter's prophecies materialize. The family doctor suggests shock treatment to cure her "insanity". Nana, the housekeeper, offers reassurance to Nivea by explaining "that many children fly like birds, guess other people's dreams, and speak with ghosts, but that they all outgrow it when they lose their innocence" (Allende, 8).

But Clara's innocence is never lost, and is only enhanced when she is faced with the harsher realities of the world. She has an unrelenting will demonstrated as a child by her nine years of silence following the death of her older sister, Rosa. Everyone is extremely threatened by Clara's silence, and they try every means they can think of to make her speak again. All of their attempts fail, for Clara was "feeling within her the silence of the entire world" (Allende, 39). Silence becomes a form of power for Clara, which she later uses to withdraw from her marriage by cutting off all verbal communication with Esteban. It is during those nine years of silence that Clara truly cultivates her ability to move objects without touching them and to predict the future. Allende writes of this time:

> Clara lived in a universe of her own invention, protected from life's inclement weather, where the prosaic truth of material objects mingled with the tumultuous reality of dreams and the laws of physics and logic did not always

> apply. Clara spent this time wrapped in her fantasies, accompanied by the spirits of the air, the water, and the earth. For nine years she was so happy that she felt no need to speak.
>
> (Allende, 82)

Clara begins speaking again in order to predict her marriage to Esteban. She invites Ferula, Esteban's sister, to live with them, and soon they are all residing in the big house on the corner, also known as the house of the spirits. Clara continues perfecting her abilities as a clairvoyant, and tries to communicate telepathically with Esteban while he is away in the country. Yet he is not particularly missed, for "while he was in the countryside, life in the big house on the corner changed, making way for a gentle routine without men" (Allende, 97). Ferula, Esteban's sister, is ecstatic when Esteban is away because she can have Clara all to herself. The house becomes a battleground for Esteban and Ferula's need to possess Clara, who is, of course, way beyond their reach.

When Clara arrives at Trés Marias, she immediately sees beyond the orderliness that Esteban boasts of. For the first time in the novel, she focuses her energy on the material needs of the community which include teaching, sewing, working in the store, and treating various ailments. For the time being, she sets aside her spiritual pursuits and concentrates on the more concrete problems at hand. Her life before arriving at Trés Marias had been nicely sheltered from the hardships of the world outside, but life in

the country presents her with a new reality. "She was not impressed by the brick houses, the school, and the abundant food, because her ability to see what was invisible immediately detected the workers' resentment, fear and distrust" (Allende, 105). Clara's presence at Trés Marias evokes a major change in Esteban's harsh way of living, and the peasants, like everyone else, fall in love with her. She becomes the root of strength and hope for everyone in the community.

Continually bombarded by Esteban's outrageous temper tantrums, Clara is miraculously able to stand her ground time and again. For instance, when Clara is about to give birth for the second time, Esteban jokingly expresses his wish for a baby boy who can carry on his name. When Clara reveals her premonition that she will give birth to twin boys, neither of whom will be given the name "Esteban", he angrily explodes and smashes a porcelain jar in order to frighten her. She remains unmoved and inflexible, and Esteban is powerless to make her change her mind. He storms out of the house and heads for the Christopher Columbus, a house of prostitutes. He turns to other women for comfort and assurance when he is unable to get what he demands from Clara. Ironically, the woman he desires most of all at the Christopher Columbus is Transito Soto, who dreams of forming a cooperative of whores so that they can upgrade their standard of living. This attraction towards Transito

perhaps signifies a reverence he unconsciously feels for women's attempt to instill social justice and to gain equal standing with men.

Clara's wonderful attitude and charisma are frequently mentioned in the novel along with her formidable means of successfully confronting Esteban. From where does she derive such power, and what source provides her with the strength to wield her powers with such determination as to win out over Esteban in nearly all confrontations? Although Clara never directly reveals the source of her self-empowerment, the novel strongly suggests that she is being led on a path by the spirits whom she communicates with, and whom she so closely resembles. Many of her strengths are clearly drawn from a realm beyond mind and matter, from which she has received rare gifts and insights that are more important to her than the normal, confusing human regimen. As Ambrose Gordon comments, she is a link with this spirit world of which she is an extension. Gordon writes:

> Clara is the link with the spirit world. Having known the spirits since her childhood, she takes them with her to the great house as a kind of dowry. They bring her messages from the time that is yet to be, or messages from places where lost things lie, gold under the foundations or her mother's severed head in an empty field. They bring other sorts of messages as well, either directly or through such apparatuses as crystal balls and tapping tables. Less trivially, the spirits are an extension of her own clear spirit, her rich and loving femininity.
>
> (Gordon, 533)

Clara's powers are indeed extraordinary and are evidence of an emerging matriarchal strength that wards off male

domination. J. J. Bachofen, in his book Myth, Religion and Mother Right, relates this strength to the supernatural world. Speaking of matriarchal systems of the past, he states:

> The elevation of woman over man arouses our amazement most especially by its contradiction to the relation of physical strength. The law of nature confers the scepter of power on the stronger. If it is torn away from him by feeble hands, other aspects of human nature must have been at work, deeper powers must have made their influence felt.
>
> We scarcely need the help of ancient witnesses to realize what power had the most to do with this victory. At all times woman has exerted a great influence on men and on the education and culture of nations through the inclination towards the supernatural and divine, the irrational and miraculous.
>
> (Bachofen, 85)

Clara is not attached to the world around her on a material or emotional level. She feels nothing particularly special for Esteban, and treats him in the same way she treats everyone else. He longs to be important to Clara, yet she is incapable of feeling that way towards him or anybody else. Although she recognizes his various emotional states, she does not try to ease his frustration because she knows it is something he must work out within himself. The narrator describes Esteban's reaction to Clara's detachment:

> Esteban had bouts of despair because Clara treated him with the same kindness she displayed toward everybody else. She spoke to him in the same cajoling tones she used to address her cats, and was incapable of telling whether he was tired, sad, euphoric, or eager to make love. However, from the color of his rays she knew at a glance whether he was hatching a swindle, and she could defuse one of his tantrums with a few simple mocking words. It exasperated him that Clara never seemed truly grateful for anything and never seemed to need anything that he could give her.
>
> (Allende, 129)

For the most part, Clara views the world from a spiritual dimension, where human emotions often hinder rather than enhance the state of the individual's spirit.

As I mentioned earlier, Clara does bring herself to a level of social concern on many occasions, the first of which is her active involvement upon being introduced to the struggles of the people at Trés Marias, where she attempts to insure that provisions are made so that the people can live with dignity and self-respect. Later in the novel, she focuses her energies on helping the victims of a widespread epidemic. There are also occasions when she is forced to endure the harsher realities of violence and oppression at the hands of her own husband, especially when he knocks out her teeth. This is not something she forgets, or lets slip by without a strong emotional response.

Even before this brutal scene takes place, Clara is increasingly repelled by Esteban, who bosses her around as if her only purpose is to serve him. While recovering from intensive injuries after the earthquake, he takes advantage of Clara and expects to be treated as the center of attention at all times. He screams at Clara from his bed, making unnecessary demands to insure that she is thinking of him always. It is at this time that she truly awakens to her material existence, for "within a few hours, the earthquake had brought her face to face with violence, death, and vulgarity and had put her in touch with the basic needs to

which she had been oblivious" (Allende, 165). The events that occur after the earthquake also cause her to recognize the degrading and sacrificial role she is expected to fulfill as a woman and a wife. Although she waits on Esteban hand and foot while he is recovering from his injury, she does so with disdain and an ever increasing awareness of the crudity of their associations.

> Clara came to fear him far more than she had when he was a healthy, strong man who disrupted her peaceful life with his scent of the eager male, his hurricane voice, his relentless warfare, and his pompous airs, imposing his will and shattering his whims against the delicate balance she tried to keep between the spirits of the hereafter and the needy souls of the Here-and-Now. She came to despise him.
>
> (Allende, 164)

Clara's death, which she prepares for as if taking a long trip, frees her from the sufferings of the world and from her dissatisfying relationship with Esteban. Although Clara definitely makes important decisions for the family while she is alive, Esteban's will oftentimes influences her own. For example, she is powerless when he decides to throw Ferula out of their house and their life, and also when he forces Blanca to marry Jean de Satigny. This is not the way that Clara wanted things to happen at all, for she could see the evil fate that these actions would bring. Her death allows her to escape completely from Esteban's control, to transcend the trials of her relationship in the ultimate sense. In a review in the Chicago Tribune, Bruce Allen writes:

> What unifies this novel, and produces its considerable emotional power is Allende's demonstration of how families as well as countries become hopelessly divided. When Clara Trueba dies, "detaching herself from the world," she's confirming her alliance with "a world of apparitions" that has nothing to do with her husband Esteban's compulsion to possess her absolutely; it's his destiny to control, hers to escape and transcend."
>
> (Allen, 37-38)

Clara felt that her death "would not be a separation, but a way of being more united" (Allende, 290). She accepts her death peacefully and knows beforehand that she is about to die. Her death affects the entire equilibrium of the house on the corner, symbolizing an era of decline for both the inhabitants of the big house and the country as a whole.

> Alba knew that her grandmother was the soul of the big house on the corner. Everybody else learned it later, when Clara died and the house lost its flowers, its nomadic friends, and its playful spirits and entered into an era of decline.
>
> (Allende, 283)

Morrison provides us with a similar female character in her novel Song of Solomon, the character Pilate Dead, who defies authority as Clara does by pursuing a spiritual path. Born without a navel, Pilate's body symbolizes defiance against what society thinks is necessary and natural. Whereas Clara is accepted by nearly everyone who knows her, Pilate is not. She becomes an outcast and a misfit in her early teens because people are frightened by her smooth belly. She chooses to create a life of solitude for herself so that she does not repeatedly have to deal with other people's negative reactions towards her. Her solitude helps her learn to cultivate a magical existence for herself in

which she can survive simply with her daughter Reba and her granddaughter Hagar.

Anne Z. Mickelson describes Pilate beautifully:

> Many of Morrison's characters in Song of Solomon believe in the capacity of the mind to see through the chinks of the cavern--even the money-hungry and materialistic Macon Dead. But it is Macon's sister Pilate who emerges as the most powerful figure in the book with her calm acceptance of this world, as well as of another reality other than the fixed one of the world. She is thoroughly at home with herself, and has the kind of sensibility which is not disturbed by anything she experiences or witnesses. There is something splendidly pagan and primitive about her, and she is represented at the time we first meet her as having the power to evoke from others various reflections of her own kindliness and understanding. Implicitly, the author establishes Pilate's capacity for placing herself in harmony with the laws of the earth and nature. Within the orbit of Morrison's moral vision, these laws have to do with the truths of the human heart. They are the necessity to demonstrate courage, endurance, sympathy. And desire to help others, while surviving with dignity.
>
> (Mickelson, 136)

As Mickelson asserts, Pilate exists in harmony with the earth, and because of this she attains many natural powers. The rest of the world is unnatural by comparison, for it has drifted from the laws of nature and no longer understands them. Mickelson suggests that Pilate is the most natural of persons in this story, while most everyone else has somehow forgotten the underlying truths of life. There is nothing creepy or unnatural about Pilate's powers, for they are a very real aspect of her balanced state of being.

Pilate's state of being, as related to a matriarchal view of the world, seems that much more natural and normal.

> Like childbearing motherhood, which is its physical image, matriarchy is entirely subservient to matter and to the phenomena of a natural life, from which it derives the laws

> of its inner and outward existences; more strongly than later generations, the matriarchal peoples feel the unity of all life, the harmony of the universe, which they have not yet outgrown; they are more keenly aware of the pain of death and the fragility of tellurian existence, lamented by women and particularly the mother. They yearn more fervently for higher consolation, which they find in the phenomena of natural life, and they relate this consolation to the generative womb, to conceiving, sheltering, nurturing mother love.
>
> (Bachofen, 91)

Pilate exhibits mother love when she helps Ruth have the baby she so desires, and then cares for Ruth's son Milkman as if he were her own child. Another example might be Pilate's relationship with her granddaughter Hagar, whom she nurtures and cares for.

From the beginning of the novel, Pilate stands out as a unique individual who follows her heart instead of the confining societal norms. In the introduction she is standing in front of Mercy Hospital, singing to a crowd of people who are curiously awaiting Mr. Smith's leap from the roof. Morrison writes that "a few of the half a hundred or so people gathered there nudged each other and sniggered. Others listened as though it were the helpful defining piano music in a silent movie" (Morrison, Song, 6). Joyce Ann Joyce defines Pilate in the following manner:

> Pilate...possesses an ability to shape the world around her. When we meet her in the first use of flight imagery, we are not aware of her kinship to Milkman nor do we have full comprehension of the song she sings as she too watches Mr. Smith leap from the top of Mercy. Instead of reacting with awe at the sight above her head, she soothingly sings a song that solicits almost as much curiosity from the crowd as Mr. Smith. Her manner of dress and the song she sings manifest the social values and cultural influences of her ancestral background. Unsullied by the urban environment in

> which she settles to raise her granddaughter, Pilate maintains a physical and spiritual identity with her rural and southern past that isolates her from the collective chaos and insensitivity of city life.
>
> (Joyce, 187)

Within this same scene, Pilate advises Ruth to keep herself warm since her baby will be born the next morning. When Ruth comments that "it's too soon," Pilate assures her that the baby is coming right on time. The following morning, the baby is born, just as Pilate predicts.

There is no mistaking the unusually strong bond that exists between Pilate and her nephew, Macon Dead III, better known as Milkman. She is not only instrumental in predicting his birth, but also largely responsible for his conception. "Consequently, Pilate's past--the knowledge of herbs and roots she acquired from her experiences with rural migrant workers--is responsible for Milkman's birth" (Joyce, 189). Through mysterious techniques, Pilate protects Ruth from Macon's attempts at aborting the baby. And it is Pilate who cares for Milkman after he is born, in a way that is both special and peculiar. "Macon Dead remembered when his son was born, how she seemed to be more interested in this first nephew of hers than she was in her own daughter, and even that daughter's daughter" (Morrison, Song, 19). Though this particularly strong affection that Pilate feels for Milkman is continually emphasized in the novel, it is never explained clearly.

Although Pilate is intricately connected to many of the events and the people in this story, she lives on the edge of the community. As I mentioned earlier, Pilate chooses this somewhat secluded life for herself because of the frightened reactions she has received in the past due to her lack of a navel. She also supports herself by bootlegging alcohol, an operation that must be dealt with secretively and that is largely looked down upon by the more "respectable" members of society, especially because she is a woman.

> Along with winemaking, cooking whiskey became the way Pilate began to make her steady living. That skill allowed her more freedom hour by hour and day by day than any other work a woman of no means whatsoever and no inclination to make love for money could choose. Once settled in as a small time bootlegger in the colored section of a town, she had only occasional police or sheriff problems, for she allowed none of the activities that often accompanied wine houses---women, gambling--and she more often than not refused to let her customers drink what they bought from her on the premises. She made and sold liquor. Period.
>
> (Morrison, Song, 150)

Her perceptions of the world and the things she places importance upon separate her from the black community, which strives for different ideals. For example, she does not concern herself with financial security or societal pressures and cannot understand why everyone else places such emphasis upon them. Pilate's detachment protects her from a fate similar to the fate her father suffered, for by not establishing any strong attachment to or need for financial security, she does not risk feeling a sense of loss if her possessions are taken away from her. James W.

Coleman writes: "Among all the Blacks in the Michigan town, both men and women, only Pilate escapes the maddening labyrinth of strong survival response and concomitant and negating destructive impulses. Along with her strength and ability to survive, she is also loving and caring" (Coleman, 156).

Pilate most strongly influences the community by acting as a vessel of past history and ancient wisdom. Although she herself does not hold a clear idea of her own past, she refuses to let go of the few surviving relics she can still cherish; her earring with her name in it, her father's bones that she mistakes for another man's, her knowledge of medicinal herbs that she gained from the rural communities where she had worked, communication with her father's spirit, and the memories of her childhood. Due to her wide range of experience and personal growth, she is able to spark curiosity in others about how they might better enhance their own lives.

Pilate's unique lifestyle is in many ways connected to her father's death. Pilate, as mentioned in the previous chapter, places no value on the sacks of gold that she and Macon find while hiding in the cave. After Macon stabs the stranger to death, he nonchalantly takes a pee and begins packing up the gold while Pilate remains in shock over the horrific act Macon has committed. Instead of choosing the gold, Pilate chooses to acknowledge her father's presence

and to continue communicating with him. "But most important, she paid close attention to her mentor--the father who appeared before her sometimes and told her things" (Morrison, Song, 150).

Pilate shares the responsibility of the murder with Macon and, at her father's request, goes back to collect the bones they had just left lying on the ground. He tells her that "you just can't fly off and leave a body" and "she knew he was telling her to go back to Pennsylvania and collect what was left of the man she and Macon had murdered. (The fact that she struck no blow was irrelevant. She was part of her brother's act, because, then, she and he were one)" (Morrison, Song, 147). Pilate feels responsible for her past actions (and those of her brother) and attempts to correct the wrongs she and Macon committed years before. Her ability to communicate with her father and her feelings of oneness with her brother exemplify her strong sense of heritage and her respect for the past.

There are obvious reasons for Pilate's character evolving as it does. She gains much insight into herself and her life throughout the many harsh, isolating conditions which she is forced to endure as a child. There is a very beautiful point in the novel in which Morrison unveils the inner thoughts of Pilate as the character decides on the best possible way to conduct her life. Pilate begins by

asking herself very basic questions that eventually lead her to ask deeper ones.

> Her mind traveled crooked streets and aimless goat paths, arriving sometimes at profundity, other times at the revelations of a three-year-old. Throughout this fresh, if common, pursuit of knowledge, one conviction crowned her efforts: since death held no terrors for her (she spoke often to the dead), she knew there was nothing to fear.
>
> (Morrison, Song, 149)

Morrison tells us that the knowledge Pilate eventually comes to value is either "made up or acquired," consisting of a genuine compassion for human relationships. Yet, how she actually acquires some of her qualities remains a mystery in much the same way that Clara's powers remain undefinable. Pilate works within the realm of the supernatural on many occasions (the lack of a navel itself indicates her supernatural abilities), performing acts that supersede logic. One example of this might be the description given of Pilate as a healer. "She was a natural healer, and among quarreling drunks and fighting women she could hold her own, and sometimes mediate a peace that lasted a good bit longer than it should have because it was administered by someone not like them" (Morrison, Song, 150).

Pilate has human emotions and physical strengths as well. She, like Clara, is not completely absorbed in the spiritual world. Pilate puts all of her faculties to work for her when Hagar informs her that Reba is being beaten up by a man. Pilate calmly goes out to where the scene is taking place, and slips her arm around the man's neck. She

positions a knife in a crucial spot right over his heart, paralyzing him with fear. Pilate has complete control over him at this point, something he knows along with all the neighbors who have come to watch. Morrison writes that the neighbors knew he was a new man in town because otherwise "he would have known not to fool with anything that belonged to Pilate, who never bothered anybody, was helpful to everybody, but who also was believed to have the power to step out of her skin, set a bush afire from fifty yards, and turn a man into a ripe rutabaga--all on account of the fact that she had no navel. So they didn't have much sympathy for him. They just craned their necks to hear better what Pilate was telling him" (Morrison, Song, 94).

Pilate's physical strength reveals to us another complex factor that helps to make up her character. She, like Esteban and Macon, has the ability to use violence in a frightening and effective manner. The crucial difference between Pilate's use of violence and the violence exhibited by Macon and Esteban is that Pilate threatens to use her violence in order to protect her daughter. She uses it as a means of self-defense, whereas Macon and Esteban continually use violence as an act of aggression against innocent people. Pilate's use of brute strength show us that she has come to terms with not only her feminine side but also her masculine traits. She is an extremely balanced individual

who has access to her emotional, spiritual and physical strengths.

Pilate's physical strength is indeed impressive, but it is the power of her words that really holds the grip on the man's neck. Her manner of speech is highly sarcastic as she tells him that she's not sure what she should do. Can he help her decide? Plus, everyone watching cranes his/her neck to hear her words because they hold great power as well. She later uses her power of language when she creates a fantastic story at the jailhouse, where Milkman and Guitar are being held for burglary. Milkman feels shame because he realizes that Pilate was willing to help get him out of a bind, even though he had just robbed her house. "But nothing was like the shame he felt as he walked and listened to Pilate. Not just her Aunt Jemima act, but the fact that she was both adept at it and willing to do it--for him. For the one who had just left her house carrying what he believed was her inheritance" (Morrison, Song, 209).

Although Pilate is the pillar of strength in the novel, many other women are powerful as well. Milkman finds Circe, the midwife who helped to deliver Pilate and Macon into the world, still living in the house where she had been a servant most of her life. Morrison describes Milkman's experience in the following way:

> Milkman struggled for a clear thought, so hard to come by in a dream: Perhaps this woman is Circe. But Circe is dead. This woman is alive. That was as far as he got, because although the woman was talking to him, she might in any case

> still be dead--as a matter of fact, she had to be dead. Not because of the wrinkles, and the face so old it could not be alive, but because out of the toothless mouth came the strong, mellifluent voice of a twenty-year-old girl.
>
> (Morrison, Song, 240)

Nonetheless, Circe displays a very sure sense of identity. She tells Milkman how she hid Pilate and Macon in the house, and as a last resort would have hid them in her bedroom because it "was off limits to everybody in the house" (Morrison, Song, 166). Even as a servant, Circe was able to insure her privacy. Now she aims to take vengeance on the white folks who treated everyone so horribly. She speaks to Milkman of her future plans in reference to the rich white family she had worked for:

> They loved this placed. Loved it. Brought pink-veined marble from across the sea for it and hired men in Italy to do the chandelier that I had to climb a ladder to clean with white muslin once every two months. They loved it. Stole for it, lied for it, killed for it. But I'm the one left. Me and the dogs. And I will never clean it again. Never. Nothing. Not a speck of dust, not a grain of dirt, will I move. Everything in this world they lived for will crumble and rot.
>
> (Morrison, Song, 247)

All of the possessions that the white family collected in order to bring meaning into their lives hold absolutely no value now that they are dead. All of their violent and materialistic efforts could not ward off nature's forces, and Circe survives because she sees beyond their shallow materialism and connects herself with nature. Later, Milkman has a brief affair with a woman named Sweet, who heals and soothes Milkman through simple acts of compassion,

and more importantly, perhaps, helps him reciprocate with intense love and compassion of his own.

Milkman's seemingly weak sisters both change and come into contact with some hidden strengths within themselves, showing signs of power as well. Magdalene called Lena exhibits her first show of strength when she pulls Milkman into her room to speak with him. She tries to point out some important changes she has seen taking place that very much concern him too, only he does not really listen to her because she is such a meaningless figure in his life. When she realizes that it is useless to try to communicate with him, she orders him out of her room and her life. She will no longer remain silent when faced with Milkman's insensitivity towards her very existence. Milkman's other sister, Corinthians, shows individual courage by becoming romantically involved with Porter and eventually moving in with him, all of which her father and brother ardently disapprove.

Within The House of the Spirits, powerful women abound. Rosa, Clara's older sister, is described as being so incredibly beautiful that she appears otherworldly. Her beauty is a form of great power because of the effect it has on everyone she encounters. Allende writes:

> The tone of her skin, with its soft bluish lights, and of her hair, as well as her slow movements and silent character, all made one think of some inhabitant of the sea. There was something of the fish to her (if she had had a scaly tail, would have been a mermaid), but her two legs

> placed her squarely on the tenuous line between a human being and a creature of myth.
>
> (Allende, 4)

Nivea, Clara and Rosa's mother, is described as a woman capable of seeing her wishes carried out even when they involve destroying elements of the patriarchal tradition. For example, Nivea makes the men in her family cut down an enormous poplar tree, which for years had been used to initiate young boys into manhood. "It was a tradition in the del Valle family that when any of the young men wanted to wear long pants, he had to climb it to prove his valor. It was like an initiation rite" (Allende, 80). She tells her daughter, Clara, that she "knew that one day my sons would be expected to continue that barbarous tradition. That's why I had them cut it down" (Allende, 81).

The Mora sisters, like Clara, display great strength of a supernatural dimension. They use their striking telepathic abilities to orchestrate changes and to provide communications between the spiritual and material worlds.

> Via mysterious connections available only to initiates, they learned of Clara's existence, established telepathic contact with her, and immediately realized they were astral sisters. By way of a series of discreet inquiries, they managed to obtain her earthly address and arrived at her door with decks of cards impregnated with beneficent liquids, several sets of geometrical figures and mysterious tools of their own invention for unmasking fake parapsychologists, and a tray of ordinary pastries as a gift for Clara.
>
> (Allende, 125)

Even Esteban's sister, Ferula, displays unusual strength by setting a curse on Esteban when he throws her out of their house. She tells him: "You will always be alone! Your

body and soul will shrivel up and you'll die like a dog!" (Allende, 132). Esteban, at the end of the novel, remembers his sister's curse and realizes that this is precisely what has happened to him.

The women in both of these novels color and excite the worlds in which they exist, and it is precisely this variety that adds charm and mystique to the often predictable patriarchal drudgery. Men, on the other hand, tend to isolate themselves from the people around them, but time and again the men are forced by circumstances to return to the women in their lives with more loving and respectable attitudes. Joseph Campbell writes that "the patriarchal point of view is distinguished from the earlier archaic view by its setting aside of all pairs-of-opposites--male and female, life and earth, true and false, good and evil--as though they were absolutes in themselves and not merely aspects of the larger entity of life" (Campbell, 27). Allende and Morrison are well aware that both the male and female principles must co-exist in order to procreate and keep life in balance.

The matriarchal tradition, on the other hand, exists beyond opposites, beyond men and women. There is no point in separating that which cannot be truly divided and thus the matriarchal tradition embraces all life in a compassionate and unified manner. J. J. Bachofen gives another clarifying definition of matriarchy:

> Whereas the paternal principle is inherently restrictive, the maternal principle is universal; the paternal principle implies limitation to definite groups, but the maternal principle, like the life of nature, knows no barriers. The idea of motherhood produces a sense of universal fraternity among all men, which dies with the development of paternity. The family based on father right is a closed individual organism, whereas the matriarchal family bears the typically universal character that stands at the beginning of all development and distinguishes material life from higher spiritual life. Every woman's womb, the mortal image of the earth mother Demeter, will give brothers and sisters to the children of every other woman; the homeland will know only brothers and sisters until the day when the development of the paternal system dissolves the undifferentiated unity of the mass and introduces a principle of articulation.
>
> (Bachofen, 80)

Although not all the women in these novels are perfect examples of matriarchs, the women in general tend to be much more connected with this tradition than with a separatist attitude, or that of the patriarch. In fact, matriarchal ideals are seen in some of the men as well, exemplified in the character of Pedro Garcia, an old man at Trés Marias who is both a healer and a mystic. These same characteristics are hinted at in some of the men that Milkman goes hunting with on his trip to Danville, men who are able to communicate with nature and prove to be amazingly in touch with aspects of the supernatural world.

At the end of both novels, the memories of Pilate and Clara loom over and soothe the characters that remain living, while the men must surrender to the inevitable changes that are taking place around them if they are to survive in the new world that has come into being. Although both the men and the women are greatly affected by the

events taking place around them, the women are able to nurture and care for the communities of people surrounding them. They continue to grow and unfold as the individuals that they have always been, while many of the men must reconstruct their perceptions of reality and learn to live in harmony with the environment and with other people.

CHAPTER THREE

Alba and Milkman: The Struggle for Identity

The patriarchal and matriarchal powers that exist throughout both of these novels are hardly compatible with one another. The patriarchal power is composed of rigid and forceful rules that are oppressive and violent, while the matriarchal power is more subtle and less defined, inevitably strong because it is limitless in its scope. The children that are born into these communities are faced with difficult choices as to what ideal they wish to accept in order to form their own identities. They are bombarded with patriarchal notions of material gain, prestige, social power, and violent means to getting what they want, yet they are also influenced by the notions of the matriarchal system of belief, which in many cases offers them the freedom to imagine a world entirely different from the confusing one that surrounds them.

Alba Trueba, Esteban and Clara's granddaughter, and Milkman Dead, Macon and Ruth's son, both enter a world in which opposing forces offer them standards for what is right and what is wrong, yet none of these standards fit together in a way that is entirely meaningful to either of them. The patriarchal system attempts to engulf them both in its violent yet prosperous order, while the matriarchal system

teaches them to question these existing values. Neither Alba nor Milkman can completely accept the belief systems presented to them as children, for the ever changing world that confronts them insists that they discover their own, unique identities and arrange their lives accordingly. Alba and Milkman discover new ways to deal with patriarchal values as a direct result of the matriarchal knowledge they gain. They are, in a sense, caught in between these two systems and somehow must reconcile the two in order to discover their own unique identities.

Both young people experience suffering and realizations that are altogether new, and that change them significantly by the end of the novels. These experiences are reminiscent of ritual-like journeys that characters have endured throughout literary history and that people have experienced in the actual past. Many cultures, both ancient and recent, set up a series of specific tests that have to be successfully completed if the young person wishes to enter adulthood. Alba and Milkman are faced with a number of difficult challenges that open them up to newfound personal strengths and more empathic attitudes towards humanity. Their childhood innocence is fiercely stripped away by their experiences during this period, as they begin to realize the vital connections between the past, the future and the immediate present. Critic Susan Blake comments on Milkman's journey: "Milkman's quest parallels that of the traditional

fairy tale hero, who finds his treasure with the help of magical guides who appear once he learns to share his crust with a dwarf or make love to a crone" (Blake, 33). Alba, like Milkman, is guided by the spirit of her grandmother, Clara, who helps her survive by suggesting that she write in her mind.

In this chapter I wish to point out the similarities that exist between the journeys of Alba and Milkman, who attempt to form new value systems as a means to discovering their identities. Alba and Milkman's journeys into adulthood shed light upon the multiple problems that face their generation, problems largely brought on by the generations before them. The emphasis on Alba and Milkman at the end of the novels exposes the crucial connection between a living knowledge of one's past and an ability to deal effectively with events in the future. Critics have commented on the cyclical nature of time in both novels, where history tends to repeat itself until people can learn to take responsibility for their actions. Alba and Milkman challenge themselves, and by doing so, uncover the truth about their pasts and recognize their own responsibility to embody a new level of social consciousness and human compassion.

Alba and Milkman are not the first characters in these novels to embark on journeys of personal growth. Both Macon and Esteban are faced with intense emotional upheaval

throughout their childhoods, but without the many options that are available to Milkman and Alba, they both choose to secure their futures through material gain, power and social prestige. By the end of both novels, however, Macon and Esteban's journeys begin to lead them into uncontrolled territories where their financial prosperity and social rank mean nothing. Clara and Pilate are involved in journeys of their inner selves, for as women their options have been limited. They are prohibited from securing any real financial advantages because the patriarchal systems, which they are part of, have reserved these privileges almost exclusively for men. Their other option is to be submissive and obedient to the men in their lives, but they are too far along on their journeys of self-awareness to even consider the latter as an option. Besides, their exclusion from the advantages of the patriarchal system paradoxically works to their advantage, as they derive great power from the lives they lead instead.

In "The Quest for and Discovery of Identity in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon," Valerie Smith asserts:

> Song of Solomon centers on Milkman Dead's unwitting search for identity. Milkman appears to be doomed to a life of alienation from himself and from others because, like his parents, he adheres to excessively rigid, materialistic, Western values and an attendant linear conception of time. During a trip to his ancestral home, however, Milkman discovers his own capacity for emotional expansiveness and learns to perceive the passage of time as a cyclical process. When he incorporates both his familial and his personal history into his sense of the present, he repairs

> his feelings of fragmentation and comprehends for the first time the coherence of his own life.
>
> (Smith, 727)

In this brief summary of Milkman's experiences, Smith points out that without Milkman's understanding of and reconciliation with his ancestral past, he is incapable of the radical transformation of self that he so desperately needs. His acknowledgement of his own past plays a crucial role in freeing him from the bondage of his parents' lives, the small town pressures, and his own self-centered and narrow-minded attitudes.

For Alba, the same principles hold true. Without a thorough evaluation of her family's past and its connection with her own existence, she would not experience extreme changes in consciousness. James Grove, in speaking of the cycle of violence that engulfs the Trueba family, writes:

> Alba's awareness of this vicious cycle reflects Allende's thematic intention 'to show that life goes in a circle, events are intertwined, and that history repeats itself, there is no beginning and no end.' As with other contemporary Latin American writers, history is, for Allende, a cumulative continuum where the present is the sum of all past moments, where the sins of the fathers influence the lives of their ancestors, where there is no such thing as 'was'.
>
> (Grove, 459)

Thus, an understanding of the past simultaneously endows one with an understanding of the present conditions of life, which is precisely what Alba needs as she attempts to come to terms with the violence being used against her. This understanding helps her to endure the pain of torture and continue onward with her life.

The most obvious difference between the two characters lies in their sexual identities. Before embarking on his journey of self-discovery, Milkman embodies the values of his father, including an emphasis on wealth, insensitivity and violence. Although Milkman questions the imposing desire of his father to take over the real estate business someday, he is definitely headed in that direction and actually feels a partnership with his father when they plot to discover the lost gold. Alba, on the other hand, is much more inclined to follow in the footsteps of her mother and grandmother, and finds it impossible to visualize inheriting Trés Marias since her grandfather's logic of ownership seems obscure to her. Even though Alba is already a part of the steady stream of feminine consciousness that abounds in her family, her journey to self-awakening is no less grueling than that of Milkman's, and in many ways is all the more so.

These two characters experience dramatic change in awareness, and this change exemplifies an opening of the feminine side of consciousness, or a consciousness of greater sensitivity, awareness and compassion than that offered by the patriarchal world. Milkman, who is strongly inspired by his Aunt Pilate, becomes amazingly conscious of his own self-centered and limiting attitudes, and realizes that the things--money, power--he has considered valuable are the least valuable of all. Alba, who is guided by the prompting of her grandmother Clara's spirit, also awakens to

the realization that her attitudes--her longing to give up and die--will kill her if she does not find a new source of inspiration and power. In this way she comes to feel a sense of understanding for her oppressors, realizing that this understanding is the only way to end the wheel of terror that has gone on for so many generations.

Alba spends her childhood engulfed by the eccentricities of the people in the big house on the corner. She felt a sense of security, for "when Clara was alive and Alba was still a child, the big house on the corner was a cloistered world in which she grew up protected even from her own nightmares" (Allende, 266). Clara, Esteban, her mother Blanca and her Uncles Jaime and Nicholas pressure Alba to accept their many opposing views. With no other children to play with, the narrator says that "Alba did not feel the least bit lonely. In fact, there were times when she would have been delighted to escape her grandmother's clairvoyance, her mother's intuition, and the clamor of all the eccentric people who were constantly appearing, disappearing, and reappearing in the big house on the corner" (Allende, 269). But Alba's childhood is wonderful in spite of her familial pressures, and she experiences great freedom to discover and create in an independent fashion. She is receptive to the knowledge and ideas that each person in the household shares with her, but "for Alba, the most important person in the house and the strongest presence in her life

was her grandmother. She was the motor that drove the magic universe that was the rear section of the big house on the corner, where Alba spent her first seven years in complete freedom" (Allende, 281).

By the time Alba is born, Clara and Esteban are no longer speaking with one another, although they are not outwardly hostile either. Alba has a completely separate relationship with her grandfather, who takes her to Trés Marias every summer to prepare her for an inheritance that she does not want. Alba becomes the focus of Esteban's love and communication, as she is the only person with whom he maintains a level of intimacy. Esteban becomes very sensitive when he is with Alba, and it is this sensitivity that eventually saves him from despair. As James Grove puts it, Alba "seems to bring out the best in all of her relatives by loving them and accepting their eccentricities" (Grove, 459).

When Alba is still a child, she is already being made to pay for the serious offenses of her grandfather. While she is wandering around the house one day, she finds Esteban Garcia sitting in her grandfather's study waiting for him. Garcia, as you will recall, is the bastard son of Trueba. Although Garcia has come to speak with Trueba about a recommendation, he wastes no time in avenging the senator indirectly by frightening his granddaughter Alba, whom he fantasizes strangling and molesting. Alba is not able to

draw the connection between the threats of this strange man and her grandfather's brutality until much later in her life, when she is able to see beyond Garcia's senseless torture. Still, she is not a naive child. She shocks and frightens Garcia by identifying his penis where he has set her hand. Her ability to label his penis is also her ability to tell other people what he has done to her, although she chooses not tell a soul.

This encounter with Esteban Garcia, and others that follow, shows how Trueba's brutality takes a pathetic turn, with the indirect victim of his crimes being his most precious granddaughter. Around the same time that this incident with Garcia takes place, Alba's mother Blanca takes her to meet Pedro Tercero Garcia, her father. The fact that he is her father, however, is not revealed to Alba and instead she is under the illusion that her real father is dead. Neither is she made aware that Pedro Tercero and her grandfather despise one another, and nobody will give her a straight answer when she asks questions about this. "She guessed that something terrible had taken place between her grandfather and the man with the missing fingers who kissed her mother on the mouth, but everyone, even Pedro Tercero himself, gave evasive answers to her questions" (Allende, 312). Everyone tries to protect Alba from pain by excluding her from the truth.

Alba repeats this pattern by concealing the truth about her identity when she falls in love with Miguel. Alba decides not to tell Miguel that she is Esteban Trueba's granddaughter because she realizes that he is involved with the opposition movement. By denying the truth about her family, she is unable to admit her own identity, which she tries to hide by using the name of her supposed father, someone she has no connection with whatsoever. Alba also pretends to share Miguel's political interest, joining Miguel at meetings only because she loves him and not out of any personal conviction.

Once Clara dies, Alba forms a close bond with her mother, Blanca. "For Alba, her mother was the only stable person in the drifting ship that was the big house on the corner after Clara's death. Blanca fought the destruction and decline with the ferocity of a lioness, but it was clear it was a losing proposition" (Allende, 301). It is her mother, in many ways, that Alba grows to resemble most closely. Alexander Coleman observes:

> Alba is the survivor-narrator of the novel. She is generous and feisty, having inherited her mother Blanca's rebellious nature. Like her mother, she takes a lover from another class. Miguel is 'one of those fatal men possessed by a dangerous idealism and an intransigent purity.' It is because of him that she is jailed, and it is she who brings together all the strands of this dynamic history in the stunning final pages, a remarkable meditation on the carnage caused by her grandfather and his class, and by the equally militant determination of the Socialists to oppose a return to oligarchy.
>
> (Coleman, 22)

Alba, however, goes one step further than her mother, and risks undoing the security of her home and family for the love of Miguel. Although Blanca definitely runs a risk by her involvement with Tercero, a risk that eventually destroys her relationship with her father, she becomes increasingly unwilling to change her situation which offers her comfort yet is deeply unsatisfying. She finally does commit herself to a life with Tercero, but only after the military destroys her family security.

As Coleman argues, Alba's relationship with Miguel is responsible for both the torturous nightmare Alba is put through and the resulting awakening of her personal empowerment. Due to her devout yet ignorant nature, Alba spends the night at the student demonstration, much more so she can be near Miguel than in order to stand by her beliefs, which she is so unsure of at this point. But the conditions at the demonstration are harsh, and when Alba becomes sick and frightened, she is led outside and handed over to the police officers. Esteban Garcia has now become a well-established member of this force, and immediately begins harassing Alba with an array of derogatory statements. When Alba is safe at home again, she spends time reflecting on her past, bringing forth the hidden memories of Esteban Garcia:

> Remembering all that, Alba discovered that the nightmare had been crouched inside her all those years and that Garcia was still the beast waiting for her in the shadows, ready to

> jump on top of her at any turn of life. She could not know it was a premonition.
>
> (Allende, 328)

This demonstration is a turning point in Alba's awakening, for it takes these harsh conditions to make her aware of the fact that there has been a nightmare "crouched inside her all those years." By spending the night at the demonstration with the intention of staying close to Miguel, Alba is shaken from her illusion of love, as she discovers that Miguel cannot protect her from the forces of nature and the stark deprivations demanded of the demonstrators. Plus, the men are running the show both inside and outside the demonstration, and some of the other students comment that Alba is really just a nuisance there. To top off her miserable night at the campus, Alba is handed over to the police officers outside, who represent an even harsher patriarchal view of the world, exemplified by more demeaning remarks aimed at Alba's sexuality. Alba finds that she has indeed been on the wrong path, relying on Miguel so heavily without equipping herself with the necessary knowledge of the circumstances that engulf her. She returns home empowered with new ideas and convictions, with a clear understanding of her country's political unrest.

At this point in the story the revolutionary movement in the country speeds up, and this irreconcilable split in the country coincides with "a division that began to spread within every family in the land" (Allende, 341). The Trueba

family is no exception to this division, and Alba finds that she can no longer play the role of the innocent granddaughter. For the first time in the story, Alba becomes infuriated with her grandfather's political sentiments and bursts forth in her own show of violence. Alba becomes irate with her grandfather's ignorant celebration of the successful military coup, at which time she grabs the champagne glass from his hand and shatters it. "Alba snatched it from his hand and hurled it against the wall, shattering it to bits. Blanca, who had never had the courage to oppose her father, did not attempt to hide her smile" (Allende, 371). By this act Alba shatters much more than the glass. She shatters her own passivity and the unquestionable position of her patriarchal grandfather. Alba's outbreak of violence actually puts her in touch with a strength she herself has been unaware of until this time. Her act of violence signifies her personal growth and acceptance of the masculine traits within herself, traits that she needs to acknowledge in order to truly assert herself in the patriarchal world. In this way she differs from Clara, who was never outwardly violent but instead chose more passive avenues of assertion. At first these changes isolate Alba much more than they liberate her since her mother and her grandfather do not want to acknowledge that these changes are taking place:

> She knew what was taking place in the country, which was why she walked around with knots in her stomach, why her hands

> shook, and why, whenever she heard that someone had been taken prisoner, she broke out in a rash from head to foot, like someone with the plague. But there was no one with whom she could speak about these things, not even her grandfather, because people preferred not to know.
>
> (Allende, 378)

The political unrest strips the Trueba family of their sense of security. Along with the assassination of the socialist president comes the brutal death of Alba's uncle, Jaime, and the deaths of numerous others sharing similar political ideologies. Trueba attempts to deny that the starving people on the streets or his own son's disappearance have anything to do with the new government he has helped to place in power. But soon he must admit to himself and to his family that he has made a dreadful mistake, and in this rare moment of tenderness his daughter Blanca reconciles herself to him. She tells him that his archenemy Pedro Tercero is in hiding in their house, and that she wishes to leave the country with him. When Trueba finds he is incapable of stirring up any of the hatred he had so long harbored for Tercero, he decides to help him get out of the country by means of some remaining political connections.

The political upheaval and the internal unrest within her family force Alba to form, for the first time, strong convictions of her own. "She felt that everything was made of glass, as fragile as a sigh, and that the machine-gun fire and bombs of that unforgettable Tuesday had destroyed most of what she knew, and that all the rest had been smashed to pieces and spattered with blood" (Allende, 378).

She begins to take incredible risks by hiding blacklisted persons and helping them over embassy walls, temporarily forgetting about her own sense of loss and concentrating on the needs of others. She recognizes that her grandfather is largely responsible for the horrendous actions of the military, yet her anger is subdued by the love she cannot help but feel for him. "She blamed her grandfather for what had taken place, but then, seeing him hunched in his armchair calling out to Clara and his son in an interminable murmur, her love for the old man returned and she ran to embrace him, running her hands through his white hair and comforting him" (Allende, 378). This is only the beginning of the terror Alba is about to undergo.

In Song of Solomon, Milkman's childhood endows him with a confused, dulled sense of identity. Named after his father and grandfather, his birth name is Macon Dead, III. When the neighborhood gossip discovers Ruth breastfeeding Macon III, who is already walking and talking, Freddie exclaims that Macon III is indeed a genuine Milkman. Everyone in town begins to call him by this name, except the members of his own family, some of whom do not know where it originated. Lucinda H. MacKethan, in an article focusing on naming in Morrison's novels, says that "his father was sure that this nickname for his son, picked up with glee by the whole community, had some 'filthy connection' with his wife, whom he despised, and so the name, which came into being as

a joke, evolved into a truth, not about Milkman himself but about his parents, their diseased relationship, and their ambiguous feelings about him" (MacKethan, 203). These ambiguous feelings directed towards Milkman, mentioned earlier in this paper, include Macon's furious reaction to his son's conception as well as Ruth's unhealthy desire for connection with her son. Macon's fury shifts to a sense of prideful ownership once he realizes that this conception has produced a son whom he can shape into his own likeness while Ruth simultaneously distances herself from her son for fear of Macon's reprisals.

Milkman's relationship with his father lacks tenderness and understanding, as his father directs him about in stern tones and never has any intimate communication with him. His relationship with his mother is also devoid of the essential elements of love and compassion, for Macon II prevents Ruth from fulfilling some basic motherly duties because he does not trust her. Milkman becomes a pawn that Macon II works hard at forming, and sets beside him with the rest of his family as property that he is proud of. Their Sunday drives in the Packard are the epitome of Macon's ideas of family, as it appears that the Packard is the true focus of his affections. For Milkman himself, the drives symbolically place him right between his mother and father, where he can see nothing but the dashboard and a silver winged statute which represents the freedom he is lacking:

> For the little boy it was simply a burden. Pressed in the front seat between his parents, he could see only the winged woman careening off the nose of the car. He was not allowed to sit on his mother's lap during the drive--not because she wouldn't have it, but because his father objected to it. So it was only by kneeling on the dove gray seat and looking out the back window that he could see anything other than the laps, feet, and hands of his parents dashboard, or the silver winged woman posed at the top of the Packard. But riding backwards made him uneasy. It was like flying blind, and not knowing where he was going--just where he had been--troubled him. He did not want to see trees that he passed, or houses and children slipping into the space the automobile had left behind.
>
> (Morrison, Song, 31)

Milkman perceives his father to be the all powerful figure in the household, and he barely even notices the existences of his mother and his sisters, who all seem the same to him. Yet these very women provide the essential groundwork for his life. They cook for him, bathe him, and wait on him hand and foot. Milkman basically accepts his narrow, unstimulating existence and abuses some of the people who revolve in it. Betty Gawthrop describes Milkman's attitudes:

> The boy Milkman is much influenced by the people who touch his life and urge him to adopt their ways. He is essentially passive, accepting all, choosing none. He accepts his father's offer to work in the real estate business, and conducts the business according to his father's ways. He accepts his mother's friends and social position, and enjoys parties and the social contacts of the best black social stratum. He accepts the love and generosity of Pilate and Hagar, and uses them both, without reciprocating in any real way.
>
> (Gawthrop, 791)

The day he goes to visit his Aunt Pilate, he begins to see a little more of what life can offer him. His father has forbidden him to go anywhere near Pilate or her daughters,

and once Milkman does see how Pilate lives, he realizes that his father is actually afraid of her. Milkman also recognizes that Pilate and her daughters give him a strange, new feeling of happiness.

> Milkman was five feet seven then but it was the first time in his life that he remembered being completely happy. He was with his friend an older boy--wise and kind and fearless. He was sitting comfortably in the notorious wine house; he was surrounded by women who seemed to enjoy him and who laughed out loud. And he was in love. No wonder his father was afraid of them.
>
> (Morrison, Song, 47)

Milkman's experiences at Pilate's house provide him with a whole new realm of possibilities. He sees for the first time in his life that people can be happy and laugh out loud, that they do not always have to live so rigidly like his father. This visit to the winehouse symbolizes the beginning of Milkman's quest for some new sense of self, and Pilate comes to have a major influence on Milkman's attitudes. Milkman attempts to create an identity separate from that of his father by differing from him in as many ways as he can. He does so out of a fear that he could never be as perfect as his father even if he tried because one of his legs is shorter than the other, and he is somewhat obsessed with the thought of this deformity.

> Milkman feared his father, respected him, but knew, because of the leg, that he could never emulate him. So he differed from him as much as he dared. Macon was clean-shaven; Milkman was desperate for a mustache. Macon wore bow ties; Milkman wore four-in-hands. Macon didn't part his hair; Milkman had a part shaved into his. Macon hated tobacco; Milkman tried to put a cigarette in his mouth every fifteen minute. Macon hoarded his money; Milkman gave his away.
>
> (Morrison, Song, 63)

This desire to differ from his father as much as possible results in Milkman's compulsion to hit his father after his father hits Ruth. Milkman's show of violence drives him into a state of desperation because he realizes that the appalling aspects of his father's life are qualities that he possesses as well. He has been ungrateful and disrespectful towards the women in his family in the same way that his father has been. So, in fact, his desire to create an identity different from his father's causes him to take on even more of his father's characteristics than he had before all this strong opposition began.

One similarity that Milkman shares with his father is his insensitivity towards other people and his self-centered vision of the world. Milkman abandons Hagar in the same way his father neglects Ruth. Both men treat women in extremely disrespectful ways, and have no ability to empathize with them. Valerie Smith writes:

> Before Milkman leaves Michigan, he perceives the world in much the same way that his father does. His steadiness of vision and lack of compassion allow him to abuse remorselessly and unself-consciously the people around him. For instance, his letter to Hagar reveals his inability to understand her feelings and psychology despite their years of intimacy. He fails to accept responsibility for ending their relationship: instead, he writes little more than a business letter suggesting that he leave her for her own best interest. Moreover, his sister Lena tells him that he has 'urinated on the women in his family.' That is, he has demanded their service and shown them no consideration. He has presumed to know what is best for them without knowing them at all.
>
> (Smith, 721)

Although Milkman maintains a cool sense of calm when confronted by Hagar and Lena's emotions, he gives very little thought to what they have said or how they are feeling. Even his intrigue and respect for Pilate diminishes when his father thinks up the scheme to steal the gold. The thought of gold greatly excites Milkman, who thinks it will solve all his problems and free him from his family and small town. It is this search for gold, however, that leads him to an understanding of his past, and as he searches he begins to forget all about the gold and focuses on opening himself up to the stories he hears about his ancestors, and the feeling of enhancement that this knowledge offers him.

Milkman chooses to embark on his journey wholeheartedly with dreams of grandeur and financial prosperity. Even when faced with barriers, like getting beaten up or realizing Guitar is trying to kill him, Milkman becomes all the more determined to get to the root of his problems. Alba's journey into her terrorized awakening is, as opposed to Milkman's, a journey that she has no control over. The police abduct her in the middle of the night and begin to endlessly torture her both physically and psychologically. She has absolutely no control over the situation that prevails, yet manages to cultivate a determination of her own just when she is so eagerly awaiting death. "When she had nearly achieved her goal, her grandmother Clara, who she had invoked many times to help her die, appeared with the

novel idea that the point was not to die, since death came anyway, but to survive, which would be a miracle" (Allende, 344).

Although Alba is actively involved in helping victims of the military's persecution, Garcia orders Alba to be kidnapped much more because of her ties with her grandfather than her own activities. The military, having gained control over the country's political powers, is able to commit atrocities that go unpunished. As a result, Garcia is able to kidnap Alba and have Trueba's house ransacked. Garcia thinks that he can finally quench his diseased hatred for Trueba by driving Alba out of her mind. When Alba goes to the prison camp, she is raped, beaten, and given electric shocks that nearly kill her. Garcia adds to this abuse by putting on a friendly facade and scolds his men for being too harsh with her, when it is all too clear that he is giving the orders.

> Garcia was very busy, but he never let a day go by without seeing Alba, alternating unbridled violence with the pretense that he was her good friend. At times he appeared to be genuinely moved, personally spooning soup into her mouth, but the day he plunged her head into a bucket full of excrement until she fainted from disgust, Alba understood that he was not trying to learn Miguel's true whereabouts but to avenge himself for injuries that had been inflicted on him from birth, and that nothing she could confess would have any effect on her fate as the private prisoner of Colonel Garcia.
>
> (Allende, 411)

It is by venturing directly into the center of her fear that Alba begins to overcome it. When she realizes that she is being tortured for crimes she never committed, she begins

to overcome the pain of her own personal injuries. Referring to Alba's realizations, Allende writes: "This allowed her to venture slowly out of the private circle of her terror. Her fear began to ebb and she was able to feel compassion for the others . . . " (Allende, 411). The harshest form of torture that Garcia inflicts on Alba occurs when he orders that she be thrown in the doghouse, a small, tomb-shaped cell, with little air and no light. She makes the conscious decision to choose death over life in order to end her torture once and for all. But Clara appears to Alba, and brings her "the saving idea of writing in her mind, without paper or pencil, to keep her thoughts occupied and to escape from the doghouse and live" (Allende, 414). Once Alba occupies her mind in this fashion, her agonies begin to disappear and she touches base with a new power she has never known before, a power to ward off death even though it seems to be the only option left. "Word went out that she was dying. The guards opened the hatch of the doghouse and lifted her effortlessly, because she was very light. They took her back to Colonel Garcia, whose hatred had returned during these days, but she did not recognize him. She was beyond his power" (Allende, 415). Alba's experiences in the doghouse help her transcend the physical reality that she is a prisoner of, and her transcendence is directly reminiscent of the experience of her grandmother, Clara, who existed in a state of transcendent joy.

Meanwhile, her grandfather Trueba tracks down the prostitute Transito Soto, who has become very powerful in her own right. Trueba pours his heart out to her, and as he pleads for help he tells her: "I know you organize their parties for them and that you have access to places I could never penetrate . . . " (Allende, 420). Despite a lifetime of cultivating political ties to protect his interests, he is powerless in providing any help for his granddaughter at this crucial time. Transito Soto has the power to penetrate places where Esteban is prohibited from entering, and it is Transito who arranges Alba's release from prison.

Whereas Alba's family connections work against her during the military uprising, Milkman's name and heritage aid him on his journey to his father's homeland. People remember his father as a charmed young man, motivated by a rare and dynamic strength. So Milkman is welcomed into the preacher's home and gains access to a well of information about his past that he would not have access to otherwise. At the same time the attitudes he has picked up from his father work to his disadvantage with the men in Roanoke, who despise his arrogant and wasteful ways. They alienate him on the spot as he unconsciously boasts of his wealth. It is also his father's stringent close mindedness that has cut Milkman off from information and an understanding about his ancestors, and divorced him almost completely from nature.

But in most instances, Milkman's heritage works to his advantage, and makes his trip more comfortable.

He ventures out on a hunt one night with the men of Shalimar, a hunt that symbolizes a search for self. The major turning point in his consciousness occurs when he finds he can no longer keep pace with the hunters and ends up alone with a mind full of troublesome thoughts. Sunk in exhaustion, Milkman discovers a whole new value in life. Morrison writes:

> Under the moon, on the ground, alone, with not even the sound of baying dogs to remind him that he was with other people, his self--the cocoon that was 'personality'--gave way. He could barely see his own hand, and couldn't see his feet. He was only his breath, coming slower now, and his thoughts. The rest of him had disappeared. So the thoughts came, unobstructed by other people, by things, even by the sight of himself. There was nothing here to help him--not his money, his car, his father's reputation, his suit, or his shoes.... His watch and his two hundred dollars would be of no help out here, where all a man had was what he was born with, or had learned to use.
>
> (Morrison, Song, 277)

Milkman's newfound revelations show him what is truly important in life. He discovers he is on a journey altogether different from the one he started out on, for he no longer wishes to find the gold, having realized that he has placed too much emphasis on wealth and social status. Instead of gaining materially, he develops a totally new consciousness. In his new conscious state he empathizes for the first time with his mother's feelings of isolation and with his father's utter sense of loss, and comes to see how wonderful Pilate truly is. Gawthrop writes:

> In this new knowledge, in this revelation of the truth, the desire for the gold vanishes. Nor does it return again. He has found something more precious: a genuine respect for people, which rapidly ripens into affection. He seeks to learn from his past, his forbears, and his relations living still. He enjoys Sweet as he has never enjoyed a woman before. He even tries to convince the murderous Guitar that he is still his true and honest friend.
>
> (Gawthrop, 292)

Both Alba and Milkman descend into darkness, timelessness and silence during their ritualistic voyages. Alba descends into isolating darkness when she is thrown in the doghouse, while Milkman is encased by darkness when he goes out hunting with the men in Shalimar, with "only a low swinging lamp marking his path" (Morrison, Song, 273). Milkman, like Alba, reaches a point when he feels too tired to go any further, and wants to give up. At the point when both characters feel they can go no further on their journeys, they experience major shifts in consciousness. They must reach the deepest and darkest aspects of themselves in order to gain a more holistic perception of the world.

Both characters return home after their life-changing journeys, and Allende and Morrison point out that their journeys to self-enlightenment have really only just begun. At home these characters must incorporate many other people and aspects of their lives into their newly acquired visions of the world. Neither character hesitates to go right to the center of the problems they had previously denied or been unaware of. In this way they both continue to confront

the harsher realities of their families and their societies, and the novels both end with these characters still in the midst of deeply personal evolution.

Song of Solomon ends with Milkman's return to Shalimar. He takes the trip with Pilate in order to bury his grandfather's bones and deal with past issues that his family has tried to ignore. The novel's ambiguous ending shows us that Milkman, who is now a liberated being, still has some difficult problems to work out, namely his friendship with Guitar. Guitar, who follows Milkman and tries to kill him, has always felt justified in his killing of white people, and now, because of his fierce desire to get the gold, believes that Milkman has turned against him and deserves to die. Like the men of Shalimar, Guitar believes that Milkman has "the heart of the white men" (Morrison, Song, 266). We are not told whether Milkman survives Guitar's assaults, but we do know that he is no longer afraid of Guitar. Thus, the real journey for Milkman is one of inward growth, with some outside elements remaining unaltered. Gawthrop adds:

> The book ends just as the battle to the death between Guitar and Milkman is beginning. And yet the book seems complete, for the most important thing has happened. Whether he lives or dies, Milkman has become a courageous, actively committed, loving human being, indifferent to wealth, appearances, and superficialities. He is his own man, knowing what he believes, and ready to fight to the death for it, but eager to live and to seek out and share love.
>
> (Gawthrop, 793)

At the end of The House of the Spirits, Alba is sorting out the events of her life by writing this book, which is a

compilation of information she finds in her grandmother's notebooks, hears from her grandfather and experiences herself. As she writes these final pages, she tells us that her grandfather has died. She alone must put all the events of her family in order, with the help of the varied documents in front of her. She writes that she feels that all persons and events have a place in the big picture of life, and they do not exist entirely at random. She explains:

> And now I seek my hatred and cannot find it. I feel its flame going out as I come to understand the existence of Colonel Garcia and the others like him, as I understand my grandfather and piece things together from Clara's notebooks, my mother's letters, and the ledger of Trés Marias, and the many other documents spread before me on the table. It would be very difficult for me to avenge all those who should be avenged, because my revenge would be just another part of the same inexorable rite. I have to break the terrible chain. I want to think that my task is life and that my mission is not to prolong hatred...
>
> (Allende, 432)

At the end of these stories, both characters have overcome the destructive effects of the patriarchal system. Symbolically, Trueba is dead at the end of the novel, and because of his death Alba is able to transcend her painful past and forgive her oppressors. She now has the resources that her grandmother has left for her, the notebooks that help her to form a complete picture of her circumstances. The notebooks help her to heal the wounds inflicted on her and other victims in the past. Likewise, Milkman has let go of all the hatred and fear he has kept bundled up inside himself for years. Pilate's death infuses him with a whole

new desire to love people and to love life, with all its share of trials. Pilate comes to symbolize the feminine elements that Milkman embodies in order to complete his understanding of existence, as he learns to care for Pilate in a way that he has never cared for anyone.

Anthony Beever, in a review of Allende's novel, points out that the final hope for the characters lies in feminine qualities, as these are the essential qualities that sustain life and heal wounds. This statement very much applies to Morrison's novel as well.

> If there is any hope for Latin America, the final pages imply, then it can only lie in female qualities. It is women who are left in the ruins, women who bind the wounds, women who begin the struggle back to daily life, and women who bear the next generation, however it is begotten.
>
> (Beever, 747)

Alba sees the pain her grandfather has inflicted on all the women he raped and mistreated, and Milkman realizes that his attitude towards his mother, his sisters and Hagar has been despicable, just as his father's attitudes have been. Alba realizes that she cannot escape from the world entirely as her grandmother Clara did, for there is so much upheaval that she cannot ignore it. Likewise, Milkman finds he is better equipped to deal with the reality he had hoped to run away from, but will most likely return to and attempt to reform.

> We are now in a period of crisis and profound changes. I believe that woman is evolving perhaps more rapidly than man. For him, the task is to discover the real human being beneath masculine limitations--to be not only a "masculine man," but a human being, who plays masculine roles--and if

> he chooses, feminine ones. We know that historically there were matriarchal civilizations and patriarchal civilizations; the ideal would be a synthetic civilization, that is neither patriarchal nor matriarchal, but one that is psychosynthetic, that is to say, a civilization in which the highest and best qualities of each are manifested.
>
> (Assagioli and Servan-Schreiber, 134)

Both Alba and Milkman have reached such an open and compassionate level of consciousness that they ultimately realize that the oppressors are really victims of this same cycle of violence. Allende and Morrison clearly reveal that it is the cycle that must be changed, not just the oppressive attitudes.

CONCLUSION

The end of both Song of Solomon and The House of the Spirits leaves the reader with the sense that although some of the characters have completed their journeys or portions of their journeys in life, many characters are on the verge of entering new phases or cycles of development, perhaps more exciting than any of the cycles they have experienced previously. Both Milkman and Alba have changed so dramatically that there is no end to the possibilities that await them in the future. One senses that difficult times are still to come for the characters (if Milkman survives), but there will be better times because the characters, Alba and Milkman in particular, are so aware of their surrounding predicaments that they will be able to discern truth and live full, rich lives. Their awareness is like a rebirth, for it rejuvenates and strengthens them.

Of the other main characters that I have discussed in depth in this thesis, only Macon II is alive at Song of Solomon's end. Although Clara, Pilate and Esteban have died, they are kept alive in the memories of the remaining characters. Perhaps Macon II survives because there are still so many aspects of his reality that he has absolutely refused to face, and by the end of the novel he has still not shown or felt much compassion for anyone. He shows

signs of changing, finally, when he gives Ruth the money for Hagar's funeral. He gives it to her without much hesitation, which is indeed unlike the Macon II we have experienced up to this point. But Macon II still has so much left to learn by the end of the novel, so much to be reconciled with, that it is as if he must live on if he is to come to terms with the world around him in the way that the other characters have.

Circumstances have forced Esteban, on the other hand, to re-examine all of his past actions, beliefs, and relationships before he dies. He has changed so dramatically by the final pages of the novel that his enemies (like Pedro Tercero) are now his friends and his friends (the military) are now his enemies. His relationship with Alba is the only relationship in his life that has remained a constant, but even this relationship has been considerably transformed. Alba and Esteban survive the military coup together, and grow to view one another as equals, both equipped with the same weapons for fighting the battles in front of them. Before Esteban dies, he has resigned from his role as the almighty patriarchal grandfather, becoming instead a very loving, open-minded old man. At the same time, Alba is no longer a naive and accepting follower; she has become a leader in her own right.

Two of the other main characters I have discussed, Clara and Pilate, have both left this world via conscious

deaths, fearless as they enter these new realms. Clara is so prepared for her death when it arrives that she writes farewell notes ahead of time to all her surviving relatives, and keeps a box of her jewels separate so that her daughter, Blanca, can maintain some level of financial independence. Pilate, who Guitar shoots accidentally, also appears to be ready for her death and accepts it as if it were no surprise. In many ways she has taken care of the final business that she needed to finish up in life, or more explicitly, she has gone back to her home town to give her father a proper burial. Unfortunately, she has not been reconciled with her brother, Macon II, when she dies. She has, however, formed an eternal bond with Macon III, who might in turn inspire his father to understand and accept what Pilate stood for.

Magic realism, a method of representation that allows for such things as supernatural occurrences, dreams mixing with reality,and communication with the spirits, plays a crucial role in the existence and transformation of many of these characters. It provides a believable context for the sometimes miraculous changes these characters experience. Magic and dreams allow us to understand the characters' spiritual growth and not merely their thought patterns. The characters change and often experience life in ways that supersede the logic and rationale of ordinary thinking. Whereas rational thinking tends to parallel a linear vision

of time and the world, magic realism allows characters to make circular connections between events that take place in the past and the present, in the material and the spiritual realities of the novels. For example, Milkman actually sees and communicates with Circe, who by all logical reasoning should be dead. But whether she is alive or in spirit form becomes unimportant since Milkman needs Circe's stories in order to piece together his past.

Magic not only allows the characters to experience supernatural phenomena, to communicate with spirits, to learn about the past, but also allows them to influence change on the more rational level as well. For the women in particular, magic becomes a form of protection; Pilate uses magic to prevent Macon from harming Ruth's unborn baby and Clara uses supernatural means to communicate with her daughter Blanca when Blanca is living in Canada. By the end of the novels, magic realism has become a means of survival, as characters use magical powers and spiritual relations to resist the violent patriarchy. Alba survives her abduction because her grandmother Clara appears to her and tells her to write in her mind, to try to survive this terrible time. As a result of magic and spiritual influences, both Alba and Milkman are filled with love and an understanding of the people and events that they rationally should abhor. Love is, in a sense, a form of magic just as much as it is an

emotion, and love is the crucial element that the patriarchy lacks.

Although magic realism allows many of the characters to change, by the end of these novels patriarchal powers still dominate the societies in general. The changes in male/female roles taking place within the families, however, reflect changes that are in process on the national level as well. If Esteban and Macon, two often repulsive and ruthless men, are able to evolve into more kind and understanding individuals, perhaps we can speculate that other patriarchal figures are resigning themselves to gentler roles also. A contradiction may appear to exist between my assertion that male/female roles are becoming more egalitarian and the fact that patriarchal governments still reside over the societies in these books. But the patriarchal powers that appear so strong and inevitable are only able to remain in positions of power by exerting even more evil and brutal measures than before. And as we have seen, these violent means can be undermined in the long run by matriarchal forces.

In Allende's novel, for example, the society has seen three governments come and go, each with an extremely different set of philosophies and morals. The military government in power by the end of the novel is the most frightening government that the people have experienced so far, as repression and violence soar out of control. The

military government even turns on those individuals who have shown total support for the new regime. Ironically, this new government does not need the support of the people now that it has gained full political power over the country, for it is being supported by a much more powerful entity, the United States. But it is only able to uphold this system through violence, a violence that seems to be backfiring on itself with the military turning against even those people who have been ardent supporters. These contradictions show the desperate attempt of the weakened patriarchy to maintain control over the individuals who no longer support it.

The House of the Spirits gives us a clear impression of the military coup that ousted President Allende in the early 70s. In many ways this novel gives an historical account of the struggles that Chile has encountered in the recent past and some idea of the struggles that Latin American countries are still confronted with today. Unfortunately repressive governments generally run by men and supported by the United States are still prevalent throughout South and Central America. The women in these countries, like the women in Allende's novel, are still struggling to have the power they deserve after years of suffering and torture.

In Morrison's novel we see not only the struggles between the sexes but also the struggles of the black communities trying to survive in a country run by whites.

Morrison fictionalizes historical accounts of actual events that took place between the black and white communities in the United States. Many of the characters and events in the story depict blacks' response to white oppression and violence. Macon responds by trying to acquire property and control people, while the seven days respond with acts of violence that mirror the violence of the white oppressors. Pilate responds by connecting herself more closely to the spiritual world and by retreating from the black community that so often resembles the patriarchal white world. Although the patriarchy is still in place by the end of Morrison's novel, and white oppression is still evident, a subtle change in these attitudes has taken place on a personal level, exemplified by Milkman's character. Milkman chooses to connect with his roots, to choose love over violence, over material wealth and social prestige. In the end, Milkman's consciousness and compassion offer hope for individuals on a spiritual level even though violence and oppression remain a threat on a physical one.

Although it seems clear that Allende and Morrison place great emphasis on the corrupt injustices of the patriarchal system, another main emphasis focuses on the individual. The individual can evolve a new consciousness despite government policies that not only stifle individual growth but kill people, for as we see in both novels, awareness and consciousness make one fully alive. The violent tempered

Esteban or Macon that we become familiar with in the first half of these novels ignore the consequences of their actions and are therefore unable and unwilling to interact with the array of truths that life offers them. In some sense, they seem only half alive; they refuse to live up to their full potential as human beings, processing only the information and emotions that seem bearable to them.

Directly connected to this emphasis on the evolution of individual consciousness is an equally important emphasis on human relationships, particularly on the relationship between men and women. In many ways these novels revolve around the dynamics that arise between husband and wife, husband and sister, father and daughter. The individual cannot be defined, in most senses, except within the context of the human relationships he/she is part of. And it is within the context of these relationships that the individual must somehow create the delicate balance between self interests and concern for others. Although the individual must maintain a separate, private consciousness in order to develop spiritually and emotionally, he/she must be able to accept responsibility for communicating with and respecting other people.

In terms of this delicate balance between the inner and outer lives of the individual, Macon and Esteban are concerned primarily with their own self interests. Their lack of concern for others basically destroys the balance

that other characters are trying to maintain in their lives. Atrocities that Macon and Esteban commit are viewed as evil and unacceptable, but in the case of these two men who have such overwhelming power, they are free to commit crimes time and again. Esteban feels no remorse when he rapes women, and Macon feels no guilt when he degrades his wife or evicts his penniless tenants. Lacking any true sense of the pain they inflict, Esteban and Macon only awaken to a level of consciousness as a result of the relationships which they are inevitably part of. It is their relationships with the women in their lives which influence them most powerfully, as Clara and Pilate embody the feminine consciousness that these men are so tragically denying within themselves and within society. Alexander Coleman, in a review of The House of the Spirits, comments, "Thus, the narrative focuses on the evolution of feminine consciousness over the generations and on the gradual acquisition of self through social action and humane concern, an evolution accomplished in the face of traditional authority" (Coleman, 22).

As I have attempted to emphasize throughout this thesis, feminine consciousness is not necessarily better than masculine consciousness or vice versa. The main idea is that both masculine and feminine elements must exist within the individual as well as in societies' power structure. The reason that the evolution of feminine consciousness becomes such an important element in these

novels is the fact that the masculine and patriarchal elements have unnaturally repressed the feminine or matriarchal elements. The masculine and feminine elements of consciousness are inextricably connected, and the novels attempt to show that the patriarchal consciousness only does itself harm by repressing the matriarchal elements that it inevitably must recognize.

In the end, many of the characters that we have come to know as readers have evened out the unequal balance of power that exists between male and female and within the self. The anger so prevalent throughout most of Esteban and Macon's lives subsides as they learn to love and to fulfill their roles as more understanding individuals. Alba and Milkman learn to love as well, as they must open themselves up completely in order to accept the truths that reality presents them with. These stories end up being about love, about individuals learning to love each other and themselves. In essence, love and understanding are the key elements that heal the wounds of the past, that offer hope for the future.

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